

Screen

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American acting

British police

Turkish film

Irish jazz

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John Cassavetes and Gena Rowlands *Love Streams* (John Cassavetes 1984) Picture courtesy BFI Stills

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Structure of anxiety: recent British television crime fiction

CHARLOTTE BRUNSDON

It is a common complaint amongst television previewers and critics that the British television schedules are dominated by crime fiction. A. A. Gill once characterized the essential quality of a television reviewer as having ‘a bottomless bucket of facile things to say about policemen. Review television and you will meet more policemen than the Krays’¹ In May 1997, James Rampton, previewing the new Caroline Quentin vehicle (*Jonathan Creek*), asked, ‘But haven’t we had it up to here with detective series: aren’t there already more tv whodunnits than suspects in an Agatha Christie novel?’² In April 1996, the Independent Television Commission censured independent television for depending on an excessive number of programmes based on the police, violent crime and the underworld³ And in response, Peter Ansorge, head of drama at Channel Four, has agreed that ‘There are too many cop shows and they are becoming all the same. The same stories, the same lighting, same camerawork, same dead bodies.’⁴ Whilst I have considerable sympathy with Ansorge’s position now, in the late 1990s, I want here to look at the proliferation of crime-based fiction in the 1980s and early 1990s, and to argue that far from showing a lack of imagination on the part of television producers, crime fiction in this period speaks very directly to the concerns of a Great Britain in decline under a radical Conservative government with a strong rhetoric of law and order. Television crime fiction, I will suggest – and particularly the police series in its various mutations – has been a privileged site for the staging of the trauma of the breakup of the postwar settlement.

Seen from the point of view of the generic concerns of the crime

1 A. A. Gill ‘They’ve dunnit to death’ *The Sunday Times* 27 October 1996 p. 16

2 James Rampton ‘Balls to the lot of them’ *The Independent Tabloid* 6 May 1997 p. 6

3 Independent Television Commission, Annual Performance Review April 1996

4 Peter Ansorge quoted by Maggie Brown in ‘The thick blue line’ *The Guardian* 29 April 1996 p. 16

series, the 1980s could be characterized as a period in which issues of policing and government of civil society, which provide the referential terrain of the genre, recur relentlessly in the news media. The well-documented, widening gap between rich and poor since 1979, with the discursive creation of the new 'underclass', the decline of skilled working-class male employment; civil disorders both unambiguously political (following the death of Cherry Groce, or the Poll Tax protests) and less clearly motivated (for example, the 1991 disorders in Meadowell); the policing of the miners' strike in the mid 1980s; a series of challenges to the integrity of the police force and the system of British justice (the disbanding of the West Midlands Regional Crime Squad, the release of a series of prisoners), and major scandals of sexual abuse – all these speak, and have been made to speak, to generic concerns with justice, truth, agency and accountability. Indeed, I think it arguable that the crime genre in the 1980s developed new tropes comparable to, but superseding, the iconographic repertoire of the 1970s: squealing tyres, unmarked squad cars, East End armed robbers. In the 1980s, I would suggest, the figure 'riot' begins to appear, deployed across a range of locations, while two younger criminal personae – the drug abuser (black, white, male and female) and the joy-rider (usually white male) – are also produced.

However, the very proliferation of series and the considerable variation between the different manifestations of the genre caution us against too simple a correspondence between crime and unrest on the streets, and crime on television. My proposition is not this literal, although I do think that the history of generic realist innovation associated with some branches of crime fiction is germane here – for example, the decision, in the 1960s, to set *Z Cars* (1962–6, 67–78) in a 'new town', or the increased gender and ethnic diversity of television police forces. Similarly, the acknowledged use of news stories as plot stimulants, and the reporting and re-enactment of news stories using fictional generic conventions, as well as the increasing use of documentary footage of the emergency services for entertainment programming, clearly offer very complex imbrications of street crime and television crime. Limiting ourselves only to drama, there is no simple story to tell when the successes of the period range from, for example, the Sunhill police station-based, thrice-weekly, thirty-minute *The Bill* (1984–) to the widely exported two-hour films of *Inspector Morse* (1987–92), from the differently dour, explicitly regional *Spender* (1991–3) and *The Chief* (1990–94) to the finally paranoid *Between the Lines* (1991–3); or when *Miss Marple* (1984–92), Jane Tennison (*Prime Suspect* [first series 1991]), Pearl and Finn (*South of the Border* [1988–9]) and *Chandler and Co.* (1994–5) have picked up the walkie-talkie from *Juliet Bravo* (1980–5) and Maggie Forbes (*The Gentle Touch* [1980–84]). I am not suggesting that we find a literal representation of the last fifteen

years in the crime series on television.⁵ However, I am suggesting that this genre, in its many variants, works over and worries at the anxieties and exclusions of contemporary citizenship. of being British and living here, now. This genre, I would argue, has proved so resonant with both producers and audiences because it repeatedly, even obsessively, stages the drama of the responsible citizen caught in the embrace of what increasingly seems an irresponsible State.

I wish here to sketch out some of the stories we might tell when we attempt to account for the millions of people in Britain – of whom I am one – watching the detectives in the late twentieth century. To do this I will point initially to three relevant discursive contexts for the production and consumption of these programmes. The first of these is the significance, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, of an increasingly punitive law and order rhetoric: an invocation of ‘short sharp shocks’ and ‘life means life’, of political parties ‘tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’. Despite the intransigent humanitarian stance of public figures such as the former HM Inspector of Prisons, Judge Stephen Tumm, in matters of crime and punishment the do-gooders have been resoundingly defeated. Schlesinger and Tumber quote the producer of *Crimewatch*, Peter Chafer, commenting on the origins of the programme in the mid 1980s in the context of the Thatcherite emphasis on law and order politics: ‘Ten or fifteen years ago I don’t think it would have worked because . . . then we were very concerned as a society about what it was we were doing to people to make them criminal. . . . In the last three or four years we’ve suddenly said to ourselves, “To hell with the criminal, what about the poor bloody victim?”’.⁶ The humanity of offenders is increasingly denied in a penal system which, assailed by financial pressures, has increasingly cut education, exercise and a range of special programmes. ‘Prison works’ is the astonishing slogan with which the last Conservative Home Secretary presided over the ever-growing prison population and the building of yet more prisons.

At the same time (and we have relevant examples in the building of private prisons and the involvement of security firms in the transport of prisoners) the 1980s saw the systematic privatization of a range of bodies, from public utilities to schools inspectors. Accompanying this privatization, indeed legitimating both privatization and deregulation, has been the aggressive abandonment of ideals of public service in favour of notions of market-governed choice. Thus the second relevant discursive context is one of privatization and private enterprise. It is this deregulatory project which allows a periodization which separates the mid 1980s, in terms of the police series, from the 1970s. For as commentators on the genre in the 1970s such as Alan Clarke have shown, the ‘law and order’ debate, which informs my first discursive context, was a key

5 Philip Schlesinger and Howard Tumber: Fighting the war against crime: television, police and audience. *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 33 no. 1 (1993) pp. 19–32, 22.

- 6 Alan Clarke, "This is not the boy scouts" television police series and definitions of law and order in T. Bennett et al (eds) *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986). "You're nicked" television police series and the fictional representation of law and order in D. Strinati and S. Wagg (eds) *Popular Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992). James Donald, 'Anxious moments: *The Sweeney* in 1975' in M. Alvarado and J. Stewart (eds) *Made for Television: Euston Films Limited* (London: British Film Institute, 1985).
- 7 John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (eds) *Enterprise and Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1991).

component of 1970s approaches to policing in the perceived crisis of government of the Heath years.⁶ It is only after the election of the 1979 Thatcher government that the radical project of dismantling the postwar settlement becomes articulated through the legitimization of 'heritage and enterprise'.⁷

The privileging of entrepreneurial practices, the validation of 'each man for himself', and the abhorrence of state interference (and support) that we find in the 1980s discourses of privatization are, potentially, directly in conflict with elements of police professional ideologies in a way which is rather different to 'law and order' discourse. For law and order discourse occupies, and contributes to, a Manichean universe in which guilt, innocence and blame can be clearly attributed. Wrong is wrong, and should be recognized as such and punished. The discourses of private enterprise, in contrast, pose both structural and moral challenges to aspects of police practice and world view. For the attack on state intervention undermines the traditional function of the police as part of the executive, while ideologies of 'getting ahead', 'making the best of opportunities', and so on, offer space for a moral entrepreneurship which is far removed from the 'old-fashioned' certainties of the law and order discourse. Particularly problematic is the way in which this discursive context opens up the possibility for actions which would previously have been perceived as immoral to be recast as merely enterprising. Most significant for the genre in this context are Freemasonry, with its whiff of mutual aid, and what has now become an established iconographic element of the genre, but was unknown in the 1970s, the police computer. Access to the computer, and the distinction between legitimate perks of the job (such as discovering whether you are about to buy a dodgy motor) and corrupt usage (for example altering records, or selling on or blackmailing with data), is one of the sites on which the genre in the 1980s and 1990s explores the relationship between policing and private enterprise.

The final discursive context I want to propose as relevant is that of 'Equal Opportunities', which has been shown to have had very particular inflections in the context of the police force and the justice system in the 1980s. The nodal point here is clearly the Alison Halford case (lodged in 1990, heard in 1992). Halford, the highest-ranking British policewoman, filed a case of sexual discrimination against the Merseyside police authority with the support of the Equal Opportunities Commission after she had been refused promotion nine times while less-qualified men were successful. The case received considerable publicity in Britain, with extensive tabloid coverage of the drunken culture of the police force that was revealed. Beatrix Campbell, who reported on the industrial tribunal, quotes from *The Independent* newspaper's commentary on the Halford settlement:

The Alison Halford affair could not have exploded at a worse time for a police service already on its knees from a succession of miscarriages of justice, shattered public confidence and rising crime rates. . . . Accusations of drunkenness [and] misogyny . . . appeared to confirm the worst public suspicions that sections of the service are brutish and sexist.⁸

8 Beatrix Campbell *Goliath* (London: Methuen 1993) p. 136

This comment brings out the double-faceted nature of Equal Opportunities discourse in relation to the police. For if on the one hand, with its commitment to recruiting the different – those gendered and ethnicized by the hegemonic culture – the discourse of Equal Opportunities has its own clearly delineated debate zone of affirmative action and positive discrimination, on the other, it threatens to characterize the existing culture and practices of the police service as equally specific in terms of gender and ethnicity. Accusations of ‘special treatment’ always threaten to unveil what normal treatment is. What was most revealing about the Halford case was not the discrimination, but the revelation of what passed for normal and acceptable behaviour and opinion in the higher ranks of the police force.

The impact of the discourse of Equal Opportunities has registered on all manifestations of the police genre in the 1980s and 1990s. I discuss the most obvious case, *Prime Suspect*, at more length below. But even the most laddish and formulaic vehicles have token women, and, as Diran Adebayo has commented, ‘TV land is full of black people turning up in the unlikelyst of places’.⁹ It is particularly noticeable that team cop shows, such as *Rockcliffe’s Babies* (1987–8), or indeed *The Bill*, have casting policies marked by some notion of Equal Opportunities representation. Not only does the Equal Opportunities discourse structure the texts at the level of casting (even grumpy old Morse has to learn to be civil to female pathologists) and, as in the case of *Prime Suspect* and single episodes of other series, provide a secondary plot line, but it is also inscribed as a discourse within the generic conventions of the series. Thus the initial response by a senior officer of the investigating team in *Between the Lines* to a sexual harassment case brought by a white female officer against a black male officer is: ‘Since the commissioner’s been parading his equal opportunities policy all over the Met, I’d appreciate a fairly sensitive handling of the case’ (Huxtable in ‘Words of Advice’, tx 18 September 1992). This public line is shown to contrast strongly with private opinion in the pub, but even there, change is recognized: ‘[Drake] should’ve been sweet to her, promised her everything, do her legs later’. ‘Those days are gone, Harry’. ‘Yeah, nowadays we throw away the parachute and land on our arses’ (Deakin and Harry, *ibid.*).

9 Diran Adebayo ‘TV cops show a false harmony’ *New Nation*, 17 February 1997 p. 17

It is in these contexts that I want to locate an analysis of three important programmes from the period: *Inspector Morse*, *Prime*

Suspect and *'Between the Lines'* The key term in my analysis, the term which I will argue elusively governs both narrative structures repeated over many different shows, and is the personal attribute of any character offered as admirable, is that of 'responsibility'. If the slang generic term for the crime novel, the 'whodunnit', could hardly make this clearer, the issue in the crime series of the late 1980s and 1990s could hardly be more obscure. Whodunnit indeed, and who can be trusted to find out? We can usefully approach this investigation through two questions: 'who can police?' and 'who is accountable?'

***Inspector Morse* and heritage television**

Inspector Morse (Zenith for Central Television, 1987–93, with subsequent single films) was the most popular television crime series of the late 1980s, regularly attracting audiences of around fifteen million. Set in contemporary Oxford, the twenty-eight broadcast films were based on the novels of Colin Dexter, with additional scripts by, among others, Julian Mitchell, Alma Cullen, Daniel Boyle and Peter Buckman, and starred John Thaw (*Inspector Morse*) and Kevin Whately (*Sergeant Lewis*)

There are two substantial existing accounts of the series. Richard Sparks, developing the concerns of his book, *Television and the Drama of Crime*, analyses the series in the context of the history of the television representation of the police, in an article which concentrates on a Peter Buckman episode, 'The Last Enemy'.¹⁰ Sparks's analysis draws on the work of criminologists and critics such as Alan Clarke to offer a nuanced account of the pleasures and possible social comment of the series to which I shall return. Lyn Thomas, with very different interests, investigates the appeal of the programme in general, but *Morse* in particular, in discussion with self-proclaimed *Morse* fans.¹¹ Comparing the films with the Dexter books, she also shows how very much less misogynistic the films are, with *Morse*'s predatory attitudes towards women replaced with a romantic yearning which makes him particularly attractive to the feminist women she interviews. This contrast between Dexter's rather leering detective and the more melancholy figure we find on television can be read as an instance of the way in which what I have called the discursive context of Equal Opportunities has specific consequences in the production of a television text. At some point in the production process, decisions were made to modernize gendered elements of characterization. As Thomas puts it, '[t]he principal difference . . . is the relative absence of sexual objectification in the portrayal of the women characters in the TV version. The requirement of quality television in the late 1980s clearly demanded a more subtle approach.'¹²

¹⁰ Richard Sparks *Television and the Drama of Crime* (Buckingham: The Open University Press, 1992). Richard Sparks 'Inspector Morse: "The Last Enemy"', in George Brandt (ed.), *British Television Drama in the 1980s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Lyn Thomas 'In love with Inspector Morse', *Feminist Review* no. 51 (1995) pp. 1–25.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 6.

For our purposes, the other interesting quality of *Inspector Morse* is the way in which, although it is clearly and firmly located in a present in which there are heroin addicts ('The Dead of Jericho', 1987), American tourists ('The Wolvercote Tongue', 1988), female pathologists (third season, 1989) and too much fizzy beer, it also seems to be set in the past. Here, I think, two different taxonomies are useful. On the one hand, the high production values and the focus on the single investigator (with sidekick) link the series with other 'retro-crime' series such as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Granada TV, 1984–5), *Agatha Christie's Poirot* (LWT–Carnival Films, 1989–), *Campion* (BBC1, 1989) and *Miss Marple* (BBC1/A&E/Network 7, 1984–92), many of which were also extremely successful, particularly in terms of overseas sales. This is the terrain of the private investigator and the English country-house murder. *Morse* is the only one of these series set in the present, but it shares some of the iconographic elements of an England of village greens, country pubs and yokel locals. However – and this contributes a pleasing tension to the series – the casting of John Thaw as Morse repeatedly returns us to the history of the police series on television, for Thaw's previous success as Inspector Regan of *The Sweeney* (1975–8) underlies his stardom as Morse, providing, for the viewer familiar with this history, a *frisson* at every burst of bad temper and the memory of another type of crime story. Indeed, the very first *Morse*, 'The Dead of Jericho', appears to offer a self-conscious recognition of John Thaw's generic history, opening and closing with Morse's maroon classic Jaguar smashed up in two different, unavoidable (and successful) bids to stop escape attempts by villains.¹³ It is as if we are being forcibly reminded that in the 1970s we watched a different kind of police series. Regan would not have given a second thought to the crashing of his car, Morse's pain is palpable, but the uncomfortable integrity of the two men is very similar. Jack Regan, dismissing the attractions of promotion in 1975, observed that there was 'nothing up there except ulcers and disappointment' ('Jackpot', tx 9 January 1975). Morse too is shown not to get promotion. The inference in each case is that it is their responsibility towards a higher morality rather than to their superiors, which prevents their elevation. While *The Sweeney* was aggressively contemporary in a way which contrasts strongly with *Morse*, the two series share the invocation of what is presented as an old-fashioned integrity. The morality in both series suggests that individuals are responsible for their wrong-doing, even if only Jack Regan and Morse have the unerring gaze with which to detect this responsibility.

However, *Inspector Morse* also belongs to a bigger category, a category constructed not through a generic economy, but through what John Corner and Sylvia Harvey have identified as one of the key projects of the 1980s, that of the heritage industry.¹⁴ Following

¹³ I must acknowledge the reading of this opening sequence by Sisset Vik to my 1994 MA class

¹⁴ Corner and Harvey (eds) *Enterprise and Heritage*

- 15 Tana Wollen 'Nostalgic screen fictions' in Corner and Harvey (eds) *Enterprise and Heritage*, Andrew Higson 'Re-presenting the national past' in Lester Friedman (ed.) *British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: UCL 1993) Richard Dyer 'Heritage cinema in Europe' in Ginette Vincendeau (ed.) *Encyclopedia of European Cinema* (London: British Film Institute/Cassell 1995)

- 16 Thomas 'In love with Inspector Morse' p. 7

- 17 Sparks 'Inspector Morse: "The Last Enemy"', p. 99

- 18 Thomas, 'In love with Inspector Morse' p. 4

the work of Tana Wollen, Andrew Higson, Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau on 'heritage cinema', we can perhaps most usefully place *Morse* within a category of 'heritage television'.¹⁵ This is a category delineated partly through its representational domain, a certain image of England, partly through its dominant structure of feeling, an elegiac nostalgia, and partly through its production values and export destiny, which offer the (tasteful) pleasures of money on the screen. This grouping – which in the main incorporates the detective fiction referred to above – also offers us the England of *Brideshead Revisited* (1981), of *Pride and Prejudice* (1996), but also of *The House of Elliott* (1991–4) and *Lovejoy* (1986–94). Lyn Thomas, who places *Morse* in the cognate grouping 'quality television', argues that while the programme does leave undisturbed this image of England, at the same time there is a resistance to the enterprise culture of the 1980s, and a certain interrogation of the virtues of heterosexuality.¹⁶ Certainly, I think it can be argued that the heritage for which this programme is nostalgic is in some ways a pre-Thatcherite one, and that this nostalgia is articulated through Morse's constant grumpiness, his sense of being out of sorts with the times.

Richard Sparks addresses this issue by returning in the conclusion of his fine essay on *Morse* to his initial question about the ways in which 'detective fictions might be considered to be phenomena which bear the imprint of their times'.¹⁷ At a methodological level he suggests there are two kinds of answer to this type of question: 'they concern what is included and what is left out'. Addressing what is included, he makes the case for reading the manifest corruption of the corridors of power in *Morse* – a corruption which perfectly matches Morse's own pessimism and recognition of human frailty – as metaphorical. This case is strengthened by Sparks's analysis of the self-conscious cleverness of *Morse*, its address to a literate audience, its consciousness of the game – the crossword puzzle – which is one of the pleasures of the genre. This address to a knowing audience – always mediated through Lewis (Kevin Whately), for those of us without the cultural capital – supports a reading of the series which also asks of its audience a reflection on a wider field. In the terms in which we have been working, trouble frequently comes in *Morse* from entrepreneurs, from those in a hurry to get riches or honours or fame, or from those who may have cut a few corners on their journey, and now have no qualms about defending their position. Thomas points out that possession of a swimming-pool is almost always a sign of bad faith.¹⁸ Morse is not tempted by the things of this world – apart from beer, opera and a certain type of woman – and is therefore, within the world of these wrongdoers, absolutely incorruptible. But Morse's unerring moral sense is not recuperable to law and order rhetoric. His is not a world in which 'prison works', but instead a melancholy place in which often the death of the offender by their own hand is the best solution. Morse's is a world

19 Sparks, 'Inspector Morse: "The Last Enemy"', p. 100.

in which he at least believes in responsibility, but also one in which there is considerable scepticism about the apparatuses of the criminal justice system.

However, as Sparks also points out, 'Morse's Oxford has no Blackbird Leys estate. Neither do Morse's 1980s show any sign of having included a Miners' Strike, a Broadwater Farm, nor any of the consequent queries about the roles and powers of the police.'¹⁹ These omissions can clearly be identified within the project of 1970s film studies as 'structuring absences'; absences inscribed, for example, in that most characteristic *Morse* shot, the spectacular, narratively unnecessary crane or helicopter shot over Oxford, showing colleges, spires, greens – a visual present of a fantasy past. Just as *Morse* in some ways denies the 1980s, so the series also, in these moments of visual splendour often matched by an operatic soundtrack, denies that it is television.

***Prime Suspect*: one of the lads at last?**

Prime Suspect, in contrast, embraces rather than disavows its place as television. It is easy to imagine *Morse*, with its continual high cultural references and use of operatic soundtrack, as a programme for which people who think of themselves as non-viewers might make an exception. Indeed, Morse himself does not watch television ('That's a technical television term'. Morse: 'I hardly ever watch'. ['Greeks Bearing Gifts', 1991]), and the arrangement of his flat does not reveal a television set. *Morse* offers itself as television for those who neither arrange their living spaces around the television set nor watch violent and formulaic police series. *Prime Suspect* is full of people watching television. This is partly because of the self-referential device of having Jane Tennison (Helen Mirren) appear on a programme called *CrimeNight*. Clearly modelled on *Crimewatch*, this programme presents a reconstruction of the last hours of a murder victim, Karen Howard, and an appeal for witnesses from Tennison. This programme is then watched in a series of narrative sites in a way which echoes recent sociological research into the varied manner in which people watch television. Jane's family watch the programme, interrupting the celebration of her father's birthday (fig. 1). This watching is attended by anxiety about whether the video is correctly set and Jane's mother, the naive viewer, failing to understand that the reconstruction is a reconstruction. Karen's parents watch, in a room too spacious to be cosy, hardly speaking but touching each other in grief (fig. 2). Sergeant Otley (Tom Bell) watches – drunk, furious and hoping that Tennison will slip up – surrounded by the drunken male camaraderie of the police force at a boxing-match benefit for senior officer John Shefford's family (fig. 3). Marlow (John Bowe), the prime suspect, tries to watch, but



Fig. 1. *Prime Suspect* (1991).



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

his wife Moyra (Zoe Wanamaker), turns the television off and starts aggressively cleaning the coffee table wearing rubber gloves. Only Jane Tennison, initially so excited about her prospective appearance – ‘I’m going to be the first female DCI on *CrimeNight*’ – is initially unable to watch, as her parents have indeed set the video wrongly, recording, wonderfully, the ice-skating instead.

When Jane does get to watch herself on television, at home in the bedroom with her lover Peter (Tom Wilkinson), the scene is used to reveal her absolute absorption in her job and her failure to recognize his claims on her attention – after an evening at which he had celebrated her father’s birthday in her absence and correctly set their own video for her (fig. 4). Jane is centre-frame, with the television to her right, Peter’s head to her left. The meaning of this relatively traditional setup is completely transformed by the fact that it is the back of Jane’s head we see. She looks away from Peter, away from us, to the magic image on the box. In this absorption in the television, herself and her job, Jane is shown to take up too much space for even such a manifestly domesticated and decent man as Peter (he loves his son, is never shown outside their flat except at her parents’) to tolerate. It is upsetting, but not surprising when he later leaves without a word as the investigation heats up.

Despite its relatively unusual form for British television in 1991 (a two-hour episode on each of two consecutive nights), *Prime Suspect* is deeply embedded within the traditions of British commercial television, and particularly the relatively populist heritage of the crime series associated in the 1970s and 1980s with Euston Films.²⁰ While in some ways presenting itself as quite classy – in the casting of Helen Mirren and Zoe Wanamaker, for example – it at the same time eschews respectability (rape, torture and serial killing with a graphic display of bodies). The interesting balancing act that the programme performs is to inscribe a story about sexual discrimination, with its implicit liberal/feminist address, into what we might call the smoking-and-drinking end of the television police genre, with its explicitly tabloid, masculinist address. Not only do characters in *Prime Suspect* watch television, but the series explicitly addresses fans of the crime genre through its condensation of procedures and reworking of familiar tropes. Like Jane’s lads, some large part of the audience is assumed to be drinking lager and smoking while watching.

It is this combination which contributed greatly to the success of *Prime Suspect*, and which I want to address here. For just as the (script) generosity shown to Marlow (the murderer), with scenes of real poignancy and intimacy between himself and Moyra, and, to a lesser extent, his mother, enormously strengthens the drama of pursuit and detection, so too does the affection for the masculine camaraderie of the police force strengthen the portrayal of Jane Tennison’s position.

²⁰ Alvarado and Stewart (eds),
Made for Television

Prime Suspect (tx 7–8 April 1991) tells the story of DCI Jane Tennison – a senior officer in the Metropolitan Police who has been kept on paperwork since she was promoted – demanding, and being given, the leadership of a rape/torture/murder case after the senior investigating male officer, John Shefford, dies on the case. No female officer has previously led a murder inquiry, and Tennison has to confront the prejudice of both her seniors and the team. Chief among her antagonists is Sergeant Otley (Tom Bell) who had been particularly close to Shefford, and who knows that Shefford had used prostitutes as informants – and for sexual services. Under Tennison's leadership the case expands to be a hunt for a serial killer, although the prime suspect, George Marlow, remains the man identified by Shefford before his death.

This brief outline reveals that there are at least two main narratives in *Prime Suspect*. The genre-traditional narrative is that of the interrogation, observation and pursuit of the killer/Marlow. This narrative is organized through the increasing revelation of the extent and horribleness of the crimes which is juxtaposed with the presentation of Marlow as a nice bloke who lives with a tough and loyal beautician/former prostitute and loves his mother. The genre-innovative narrative is that of Jane Tennison's progress from 'that bitch' to a well respected 'guv'nor', supported by her men when her removal is threatened by those upstairs, and finally successful in extracting a confession from Marlow.

Prime Suspect is clearly formed in the context of Equal Opportunities that I have described above. At the time of the first broadcast, it was known that Lynda La Plante had been helped by DCI Jackie Malton in her research,²¹ and for La Plante the series has clear continuities with her earlier role-reversal crime drama success, *Widows* (1983–5). In each case a tired generic story is given new life through the substitution of women for men. There is in *Prime Suspect* a clear agenda about women in the police force, and discrimination against Tennison at a range of levels is shown throughout the programme. The programme explicitly addresses the question of who can police, particularly in a subplot in which DCI Shefford himself seems to be a possible suspect for the murders, given his connections with several of the prostitutes. This agenda is pursued further, although less successfully, in the following two films in which the racism of the police force (*Prime Suspect II* [1992]) and possible involvement in boy prostitution (*Prime Suspect III* [1993]) come under scrutiny.²²

What is clever about the first *Prime Suspect* is the way in which the two different stories, the investigation and Jane's progress, are integrated and made to develop through specifically feminine skills and friendships. It is Maureen, Tennison's gofer, who puts to Tennison the question of the significance of investigations in Oldham, just as it is Maureen who makes the imaginative connection

21 Yvonne Roberts, 'Tough lady with the blue lamp' *The Observer* 14 April 1991 p. 55

22 The 'who can police?' agenda becomes less evident in the later series of two-hour *Prime Suspect* films with which La Plante had little to do. Detection dominates discrimination.

– Nu-Nails nail extensions – between the female victims. This crucial link is filmed in such a way as to make the shifting power relations in the incident room apparent. Maureen starts making her suggestion tentatively to Tennison alone in the busy room. The camera zooms out from Maureen and Tennison, encompassing the other officers gradually as Tennison's insistence on 'quiet' becomes louder. What started as a conversation between the two women becomes the focus of everyone's attention. Maureen's tentative idea about the nails – 'It could be nothing' – an idea only accessible within feminine cultural competence, is both listened to and recognized by the squad room at large. Knowing about manicure is, like Tennison's earlier recognition of the quality of a victim's clothing, shown to make a critical contribution to a traditionally masculine game of detection. Similarly, it is Tennison's respect for the prostitute women she meets in Oldham which elicits crucial information from them in a scene which shows both female solidarity and the way in which class difference fractures this. She goes to the pub to drink with the women, and is there propositioned by a lorry driver who tells her that he's got fifteen minutes and the cab's outside. To the subsequent hilarity of the women, Tennison does not disturb his assumptions about her, or distinguish herself from her company, merely saying that she is busy. However, the unity of their laughter is broken by her reference to her dinner party that evening, at which the two other women look at each other.

So Jane Tennison not only shows that she can police, but also that her policing brings new competencies to the job. The success of the show suggests that its complex audience address was successful. Put simply, inserting a senior female police officer into an investigation was shown to spoil neither investigation nor genre. The balancing act of the project, and the manner in which its dual address leads to real ambivalences, is shown most clearly in the repeated shots of Tennison in charge, but surrounded by images of mutilated female bodies. This *mise-en-scene* condenses the dual address of the show and represents the price of Tennison's success. Equally telling is the language in which the film's consummation, her acceptance by the lads, is expressed. They salute her by singing, 'Why was she born so beautiful, why was she born at all? She's no bloody use to anyone, she's no bloody use at all.' She responds, wiping away a tear, 'You bastards. I thought you'd all pissed off and gone home.' She is now fully integrated into the language of the lads, but unlike them she no longer really has a home to go to.

Between the Lines: 'No one's fireproof'

Prime Suspect addresses the issue of 'who can police' with a systematic roll-call of categories of persons – other than white men –

who might be considered capable and trustworthy, such as straight white women, straight black men and gay white men, finding each more trustworthy than the white males who are shown to systematically discriminate against them. It also, implicitly, suggests that an uncorrupt policing is possible through an alliance of 'new forces' with the honest individuals of the old guard. Accountability is a possibility, crimes can be solved, villains can be locked away – even if, as I would argue, these narrative solutions are partly achieved through the displacement of the crime story by the corruption/discrimination story at certain key narrative moments.

Between the Lines (BBC/Island World, 1992–4) in contrast, is much less certain of who can police and, certainly, of whether effective policing can be achieved without a necessary blurring of boundaries between policing and criminality. Devised by J C Wilsher (who had written episodes for *The Bill*), with Tony Garnett as executive producer, the series is set in the Complaints Investigation Bureau (CIB) of the London Metropolitan Police. The series is self-conscious in relation to both genre and issues of policing. This self-consciousness is immediately signalled by the location of the narrative in the CIB, a unit which is solely concerned with the conduct of the police. In generic terms, the referential world of the series has shrunk not just to the community figured as the police force, but to a group of three within the police force whose purpose is to investigate their own. The first episode of the first series, 'Private Enterprise' (written by Wilsher, tx 4 September 1992), dramatizes what is at stake here both for the genre, and for the individual police characters.

The episode opens by introducing three elements, all of which are shot using a relatively high proportion of closeups and low-key lighting effects which, with a fast edit, contribute to an overall impression of grubby realism. The first, a standard generic narrative event in the crime programmes of our period, shows drug-dealing between young people on a run-down London council estate. The dealer, Andy, is then jumped by two men who are revealed to be police officers Flynn and Tanner. Andy, it turns out, is an informant working under considerable police pressure, as well as a dealer. This too is familiar; there is a long film and television history to the 'nark' and 'snout', while the police themselves are clearly represented within the British macho heritage of *The Sweeney*. The second element, which introduces two of the three key characters of the series, Harry Naylor (Tom Georgeson) and Maureen (Mo) Connell (Siobhan Redmond), shows a meeting between Andy and these two in an underground car park. While the setting is generically familiar, as is the brief flash of headlights with which the police announce their location, their role and narrative significance is more obscure and is not explained. Maureen introduces herself and Harry as 'the people you want to see if you want to complain'.

Andy then informs Harry and Mo that 'if you want bent coppers, you should try Mulberry Street'. The final scene of the introduction is a party for what turns out to be Mulberry Street officers to celebrate the promotion of their head of CID, Tony Clark (Neil Pearson) to the rank of Detective Superintendent. It becomes clear at this party – a familiar generic trope for displaying the camaraderie of the job – that Clark's promotion will mean a move to a post as yet undecided. Clark's own ambitions are made clear by his smirk when a senior officer hints at one of the more glamorous postings in the hierarchy of the police service. 'It may be that Mulberry Street's loss is the Flying Squad's gain'

The burden of the episode is the recruitment of Clark to investigate his own comrades at Mulberry Street as the only way of answering the question posed to him at an interview in which he expects to hear about a posting to the Flying Squad. 'We have information that there's a bit of private enterprise going on at Mulberry Street. What takes you out of the frame?' For Clark the character, this investigation demands duplicity and manipulation as he recruits his wife and his lover to investigate both team-members and superiors. It also involves generic bad faith, for, as he says, 'my cover's fire-proof at Mulberry Street. No one's going to think that I'm a grass in my own nick.' The criminologist Mary Eaton, writing about the representation of police canteen culture in this series, argues that '[t]he CIB works against two prevailing values within the Met. and other police forces. The first is the widespread belief that it is acceptable to break the rules to bring villains to justice, the second that it is not acceptable to betray a colleague.'²³ In this episode we see Clark as an individual experience the shame of the betrayals he must commit. But in these betrayals (represented most vividly in Clark's denials 'You can't be a policeman without knowing villains', 'This is my firm, we look after each other') and in the failure of those no longer trusted to meet his eyes, we also see the series stake out a new generic terrain for itself, in which the ethics of police practices move into higher relief than the pursuit of villains. This first episode, which ends for Tony with the traumatic news that his promotional posting is to CIB, not the Flying Squad ('But I don't want to work in Complaints Investigation' 'If you did, you wouldn't be suitable'), both catches Tony in a double-bind through his own career ambitions and signals to the viewer that the object of investigation in this series will be slightly different. This is posed directly in the second episode, 'Out of the Game' (tx 11 September 1992), when Tony detects what really happened among the perpetrators in an incident they are investigating, but has to be reminded by each of his new colleagues in turn that they are only interested in police behaviour. As Mo says, 'It's not down to us, it's not our brief', and Deakin, sealing the episode with the reminder to both Tony and viewers: 'You're not CID anymore, you're CIB'.

23 Mary Eaton 'A fair cop? Viewing the effects of the canteen culture in *Prime Suspect* and *Between The Lines*' in David Kidd-Hewitt and Richard Osborne (eds) *Crime and the Media* (London: Pluto Press 1995) pp 164–84

There were three series of *Between the Lines*, broadcast in 1992, 1993 and 1994. While each series used the same core characters, Clark, Naylor and Connell, and their immediate boss, John Deakin (Tony Doyle), the emphases and locations of the series were different, and by the final series the police force was not the employer. It is the first series which is most interesting for our purposes: thirteen episodes first broadcast on a Friday night at 9.30 on BBC1 in Autumn 1992, attracting between six and eight million viewers. This series is centrally and repeatedly concerned with the dilemmas of the police investigating themselves, while the second series is more occupied with the power struggles between the police force and MI5. The third series, which has some overseas location shooting, moved into the terrain of international terrorism, and particularly the relationships between terrorism, private and state security bodies. Chris Dunkley, who had championed the first series as among the best on television in 1992, observed of the third series, 'How quickly things change'.²⁴ Although many series fail to maintain their quality through subsequent seasons, it seems arguable here that it was precisely the loosening of the generic ties which contributed to the problems of the third series. The rich texture of the first series, with its narrative and formal investigation of a key television genre, was dissipated by the rootless narrative premisses of the third.

The programme is a good example of the hybrid serialized series, offering both particular, episode-bound stories and a continuous developing narrative which focuses particularly on DS Tony Clark. At the same time, the concentration on trouble within the police force reveals the clear recognition of the increased public concern with police conduct and accountability. Thus the very imaginative premiss of the series is 'news responsive', as are many of the topics for individual episodes. In the first series, stories included: a police killing in an incident with an imitation gun (episode two), sexual harassment in the police service (episode three), Freemasonry (episode four); death of a young black man in custody (episode eleven), arrest of a senior police officer on a soliciting charge (episode twelve). Both the format and particular stories, then, reveal an alertness to contemporary representations of policing in the news media, and offer a particular late 1980s/1990s British embodiment of the ancient question of policing, *quis custodiet ipsos custodies?* (who will guard the guardians?). Garnett himself is on record as suggesting that the debate about policing within the service is of considerable sophistication:

'There is a very intelligent debate going on at senior levels in the country questioning this very matter [who should police the police]', says Garnett. 'The left is more at fault in this than the right. It is one of the fallacies of the left to think that the police are stupid. There are a number of extremely intelligent officers

²⁴ Chris Dunkley, *Between the Lines*, *Financial Times* 16 September 1992, p. 19. Reflections on the sleaze factor *Financial Times* 26 October 1994, p. 21. Thanks to Tom Richmond for checking my reading of *Between the Lines*.

25 Jonathan Miller 'Watching the police' *Sunday Times* 20 September 1992 p. 25

who are very concerned about the relationship between the police and the public. In some ways, there is a more intelligent discussion going on inside the police than outside'²⁵

This question is particularly figured through the issues of not only who can police, as we have seen in the other series, but also in a debate which runs through the series about effective strategies for policing. Deakin, the immediate boss of the CIB team which Tony heads, puts it like this in episode thirteen, the final episode of the first series: 'The Met. has never been cleaner I can tell you that for a fact. It's also a fact that our cleanup rate is at an all time low. What conclusion you draw . . . is entirely up to you.' This concern runs through the series, expressed usually in metaphor – 'you hang around with dogs, you get fleas' (episode nine) – but also providing a demotic history of policing within the series. For example, a senior officer observes of being picked up with a prostitute: 'When I first joined, it was one of the fringe benefits of the job' (episode twelve); or (of the same officer) 'There've been stories about Urquhart since he was in the Vice Squad in the 1970s. It goes with the territory.' The simplest version of this history is given to Charlie McGregor, a charismatic retiring officer who, in his farewell speech, mourns the days when 'we banged up villains if they broke the law', and evokes in contrast a world of sociology lecturers, counselling and political correctness (episode ten). In this demotic history, the series has very clear affiliations with 1970s programmes like *The Sweeney*, where, as Ed Buscombe has noted, the constant implication was that the police would be able to do their job better were 'the do-gooders and pen-pushers' to get off their backs'²⁶ Charlie's final question, 'Who wants a police force with real coppers in it these days?', looms over the series, and particularly over the fate of those who are shown to be 'real coppers', like DI Kendrick (Michael Angelis) (episode six), who prove to have bent the rules a little too far. This is a question of both a 'who' and a 'how' of policing, and one on which the series shows real ambivalence. DI Kendrick is shown to be an honourable man, but Charlie McGregor himself, the source of the most eloquent version of this demotic history, turns out to be corrupt.

For our purposes, what is perhaps most significant about *Between the Lines* is the clarity with which it addressed key issues of policing in the 1980s and 1990s – civil disorder, drugs, corruption, Freemasonry, secondary picketing, use of informants, racism and sexual discrimination within the service – and the ambivalence which it maintained about the strategies used to address these issues. If we examine the structure of the series with particular reference to the discursive contexts outlined at the beginning of this article, and the governing questions of 'who can police?' and 'who is accountable?', the particular contours of this clarity and ambivalence can be traced.

26 Ed Buscombe *The Sweeney – better than nothing?* *Screen Education* no. 20 (1976) pp. 66–9

27 James Saynor, *Imagined communities: Sight and Sound* vol 3 no 12 (1993) pp 11–13

Each episode has two main components: the episode story, which is usually a policing issue, and Tony's progress, which is a continuing narrative involving his love-life, where he lives and his progress in the new job. However, from episode five a third element, the Carswell investigation, is introduced, and this continues right through, increasing in significance, implicating more and more people and eventually containing all other stories. Each episode is filmed in the slickly edited but naturalistic style I have termed grubby realism, which clearly has resonances in Garnett's earlier projects, including both *Law and Order* and his Hollywood period.²⁷ Just as the CIB team investigates the police, the series investigates the genre. This is done in a range of ways. One key sequence in episode two shows Tony taking statements from police officers involved in a shooting incident with a replica pistol. Tony patiently takes the men through their statements, all of which are given in television police argot, repeating the statements back to the men, translating back and forth between this strange generic language and everyday speech.

The show explicitly situates itself in relation to what I have called the 'law and order discourse' and that of privatization. In relation to the first, it asks how law and order is to be achieved. The second is the name given to corruption within the force, and offered explicitly, in a speech about Docklands by Charlie McGregor, as the legitimization for corrupt behaviour (episode ten, 'Nothing to Declare').

About Equal Opportunities discourse, the programme is knowing and displays an unusually light touch. This is signalled early on by Mo's response to Harry's purchase of a pornographic magazine for an informant they are protecting. Mo makes a face at Harry when he displays the purchase and then takes it from him, calling to the informant that Harry has brought him a copy of 'the gynaecologists' gazette'. As with *Prime Suspect*, there is a successful rendering of the embedded masculinism of police culture, most notably through Tony's signal failure to keep his pants on whenever he meets an attractive woman. His affair with PC Jenny Dean, introduced in the first episode, runs throughout the first series. The married Clark presents it as normal and when questioned by superior officers observes, 'She's a sensible kid, she knows the score' (episode one). Dean's suicide in the penultimate episode suggests that 'the score' was unfairly weighted. Both Mary Eaton and Robin Nelson have commented on perhaps the most exceptional aspect of the series' sexual politics, the revelation in the second series that Mo is lesbian.²⁸

The ambivalence of *Between the Lines* extends beyond this, however, to the representation of CIB itself. *Between the Lines* is strongly invested in the seedy glamour of a certain image of the heavy drinking, chain-smoking, promiscuous plain-clothes man, with considerable commitment to the rendering of the pleasures of a

28 Mary Eaton 'A fair cop?' Robin Nelson *TV Drama in Transition: Forms, Values and Cultural Change* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press 1997)



Fig. 1. Tony (Neil Pearson)
Mo (Siobhan Redmond) and
Harry (Tom Georgeson)
celebrating in a wine bar near
Covent Garden. *Between the
Lines* (1992).



Fig. 2. Tony alone after the
others have left.



Fig. 3. Final credits roll: Tony
after he sees his estranged
wife.

defiantly laddish culture. When Tony first meets his new team he turns up with a bottle of whisky, and it is the command 'let's open the bottle' which really signals the beginning of getting to know each other. Here, it is crucial that Mo is one of the lads, purposefully raising a tumbler full of Scotch to her mouth. This is the culture of the police genre and indeed, if we are to believe criminologists like Eaton or the revelations of the Halford case, of the police force itself. The question of the series is whether this culture, with its necessary commitment to the lads, is necessarily a corrupt and discriminatory one. For if the series is marked by a deep nostalgia for this culture (the demotic history referred to above) at the same time its very conception implies a modernizing project.

The series offers a very politicized image of the police, with explicit recognition of high-level political pressure, mention of the Home Secretary and other less clearly identified sources of power – as in the instruction to Tony in episode four: 'Our elders and betters want a result, so get one'. On the one hand, the diegetic world of the series is well-accommodated to an interventionist Home Secretary, on the other, this centralizing project is repeatedly confirmed through the episode-specific stories of the rooting out of 'local' corruption. CIB is a centrally controlled hit squad without a local base, with no community to answer to. Tony, Harry and Mo repeatedly descend on different local manors – Beckett Park, Hamley Road, Oakwood, St Helen's – to purge the stations. The pursuit of a clean force is followed without any reference to the notions of the embeddedness within a community which has sustained many accounts of the police service.

At the end of the first series these contradictions come together in what Tony is expecting to be a celebratory evening. The modernizing project has been successful: corruption has been rooted out at the highest ranks, implicating the trio's own boss, Deakin. Tony, Maureen and Harry sit drinking together (fig. 1). But they are not in a boozier, drinking beer and spirits. Instead, they are in a wine bar in Covent Garden with a bottle of champagne. Gone are the drinking haunts and habits of the old generic police force, gone is locality and gone too is the camaraderie. Tony tries to order another bottle, but it turns out that neither Mo nor Harry can stay (fig. 2). Tony leaves alone, only to catch sight of his abandoned wife on an evening out with a new lover (fig. 3).

Conclusion: structure of anxiety

While I have been writing this article, the 1997 General Election in Britain has been won by the Labour party with an enormous majority. The extraordinary change of mood in the country suggests a rather neat periodization of eighteen years, making my concern, the

British television crime series 1979 to 1997, the period of the Conservative government. Attractive as this tidiness is, I do not think that the argument I have been making about the peculiar vividness of the genre in the 1980s is adequately served by this periodization. It claims both too quick and easy a correspondence between changes in the political sphere and the production of cultural goods, and simultaneously promises to mislead us about the continuities between, for example, the 1970s and the 1980s, or the last Conservative government and the new Labour one.

Instead, I would want to suggest that my argument is most relevant for the period from 1983/4 to 1992/3. This permits us to recognize the continuities between the 1970s law and order debate and the dominance, within the 1980s, of a retributive, punitive version of this debate. The early Equal Opportunities crime series (*Juliet Bravo*, *The Gentle Touch*, *The Chinese Detective* [1981–2], *Wolcott* [1981]) thus move out of main focus, and the period begins with *The Bill*, *Widows*, and *Miss Marple Crimewatch* (1984–), although not ostensibly a fictional programme, offers a symptomatic origin in the shift of focus described above, just as *The Bill*, with its move back into straight policing (as opposed to *Sweeney*-type policing) is symptomatic in another way of the resurgent rhetoric of the virtues of ‘the bobby on the beat’ *The Bill*, though, while offering what is in some ways a return to the police station iconography of *The Blue Lamp* (Basil Dearden, 1950) and *Dixon of Dock Green* (BBC, 1955–76), features a cast list clearly constituted in what I have called the discursive context of Equal Opportunities, particularly in the character of WPC Datta (Seeta Indrani). In the same way, the huge success of *Miss Marple*, with its elderly spinster heroine, offers a particular inflection of heritage television. Whilst a strain of Equal Opportunities programmes continues throughout the decade (for example, *Widows II* [1985], *South of the Border* [1988] and *Bloodrights* [1990]), it is *Prime Suspect* that offers the most achieved version of this cycle. For a range of reasons, some discussed by Jim Pines in his essay on crime fiction, the discursive context of Equal Opportunities has proved more productive in relation to white women than any other category.²⁹ Colin Salmon as DS Oswalde in *Prime Suspect II*, subject to racial discrimination from, among others, Jane Tennison, has remained a character confined to that particular text, unlike Tennison herself. Amy Taubin has suggested that to a US audience, the most astonishing feature of Tennison as played by Helen Mirren is how flawed the character is shown to be, while still, in Taubin’s terms, ‘the hero of our time’.³⁰ In contrast DS Oswalde, as Jim Pines points out, is still typical of the genre in Britain as a ‘good’ black character he must also be noble.³¹

In terms of periodization, I would suggest that *Prime Suspect*, the first series of *Between the Lines*, and the end of *Inspector Morse*

29 Jim Pines ‘Black cops and black villains in film and TV crime fiction’ in Kidd Hewitt and Osborne (eds), *Crime and the Media*

30 Amy Taubin ‘Sex & race & law & order’ *The Village Voice* 16 February 1993 p. 44

31 Pines ‘Black cops and black villains’ p. 74. Colin Salmon who plays DS Oswalde recently appeared in the much more traditional role of pimp and murderer in the generically cognate *Gold* (tx 1 December 1997, ITV).

(except for the one-offs) conclude the grouping with which I have been concerned, with *Cracker* (1993–5) as a text of transition. The early 1990s, particularly through Jane Tennison, familiarize us with the figure of a senior (white) woman giving orders, even as her screen presence is juxtaposed with images of mutilated female bodies. *Cracker*'s Jane Penhaligon is clearly a related, but later 1990s, figure. What I have attempted to show through detailed analysis of three quite different programmes from this period is the way in which they share a concern with the apparatuses and institutions of policing and criminal justice, as well as, in different ways, an engagement with the television police genre.

An obvious response would be to suggest that these are, in fact, the features of the genre. My argument would be that there is a historical specificity to the intensity of the engagement with these issues during the period 1984 to 1992, particularly articulated through questions of responsibility and accountability in policing. This 'age of anxiety' for the genre involves qualitatively different inflections of the recurrent questions of policing than we find in either the 'law and order populism' of the 1970s or the 'equal opps/GLC' period of the early 1980s. These are programmes produced in, and responding to, what we might, to raid an idea from Raymond Williams, call a 'structure of anxiety', a structure of feeling that I have tried to show is clearly articulated within the programmes themselves – and the many others of the same period.

The later 1990s have brought a move away from an address to the social in the genre. Arguably, the dynamic genre of the mid 1990s is the medical drama. There is at the same time a move towards the medicalization of crime within the crime series, with the focus moving away from the police as the solvers of riddles to pathologists and criminal psychologists (*Cracker*, *Dangerfield* [1995–], *Silent Witness* [1996–], *McAllum* [1997–], *Bliss* [1997–]). In the terms in which I have been working, I would suggest that the dynamism of the questions about policing – who can police? who is responsible? – has become diminished, and instead there is a detectable tendency towards a spectacularization of the body and site of crime. I am not sure that the structure of anxiety has gone, but the worrying seems to be less about policing and justice. Should this article end, then, with a more sustained address to the issue of what complex sets of causality lead to certain television genres being more dynamic, and perceived as more socially expressive, at particular periods? Why, to put crudely what I think has recently happened to British television, was it then cops and now docs? Why did the investigation of the police and the genre cede airtime to staring at bodies and speculating about the supernatural? I have offered an outline of the significant discursive contexts in which I would argue those cop shows were produced, and to which they in turn contributed, although I have not addressed the significant influence of the US entertainment industry –

for example, *Prime Suspect* cannot really be fully addressed without attention to *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991). I do indeed think that further exploration of these arguments requires engagement both with theories of genre in television, and with empirical work on the production processes of television. But that would be another story

Where does it happen? The place of performance in the work of John Cassavetes

GEORGE KOUVAROS

*Gone are the days when love of cinema meant talking about 'film as film' – works with their own aesthetic texture, structure and textuality. Like Bertolucci or Daney we may now need to treat films as events that have happened to us, experiences that are inalienably ours, and thus as material facts*¹

1 Thomas Elsaesser 'Rivette and the end of cinema', *Sight and Sound* vol 1 no 12 (1992) p 22

2 Cassavetes became involved in the production of one other film after *Love Streams* in 1985 he agreed to finish *Big Trouble* after the departure of its director Andrew Bergman. As recounted by Ray Carney Cassavetes's experience attempting to finish the film proved a disaster. Many of his suggested changes were vetoed by the studio, in the end he was given directorial credit for a film about which he was somewhat embarrassed. See Ray Carney 'Unfinished business', *Film Comment* vol 25 no 3 (1989) p 49

Near the end of John Cassavetes's *Love Streams* (1984), Robert Harmon, played by Cassavetes himself, is framed in the rain-swept window of his house. Gazing directly at the camera, Robert takes off his baggy straw hat, waves goodbye and then, as if walking off stage, slowly exits the frame. A strong sense of exhaustion hangs over this final scene. Robert's body, which has been caught up in waves of intoxication, now appears emptied and adrift. His wave goodbye to the camera can be seen as a gesture of farewell to his sister, Sarah, played by Cassavetes's wife Gena Rowlands. Sarah has just driven off in the rain, inspired by a dream of reconciliation with her husband and daughter. For those familiar with the history of Cassavetes's career and approach to filming, however, this gesture of farewell suggests a range of other meanings and possible significances that resonate beyond the narrative strands of the film in which it occurs. Due to the dire state of his health at the time and the constant difficulty of raising money for his films, it is hard not to suspect that when Cassavetes began filming *Love Streams* he did so in the knowledge that it was likely to be his last film.² His wave

goodbye to the camera, then, can be seen as a farewell to filmmaking, a final bow to the audience that recalls the one conducted by the actors at the end of his earlier film *Opening Night* (1978). Viewing this last adieu, one is also struck by the fact that it is directed at Gena Rowlands, thus marking the end of a unique cinematic partnership

The final scene in *Love Streams*, with its resonances and echoes, illustrates a defining feature of Cassavetes's approach to cinema. His films enact a constant oscillation between character and actor, a sense that what we witness on screen is not just a matter of cinematic performance, but something that touches the life of the actor. For a generation of film students wary of any sort of metaphysical approach to cinema, this blurring of performance and being is difficult to discuss. Apart from some brief but interesting observations by James Naremore in *Acting in the Cinema*,³ and Ivone Margulies's excellent study of Wim Wenders's *Lightning Over Water* (1980),⁴ film studies has tended to deflect considerations of how being is constructed in and through the cinema towards an examination of the economic and institutional factors that underpin star persona. The work on star persona has proved extremely useful in analysing how the casting of a star can blur the boundary between what Miriam Hansen describes as 'diegesis and discourse, between an address relying on the identification with fictional characters and an activation of the viewer's familiarity with star on the basis of production and publicity intertexts'.⁵ Existing as it does on the margins of Hollywood production and distribution systems, the blurring of character and actor found in Cassavetes's work is most productively understood not in terms of the operation of discourses of stardom, but rather in terms of the rethinking of performance codes concerning the actorly versus the non actorly, the cinematic versus the everyday. In short, what seems to be in question is both the construction of a particular type of performative space and the response that this reconfiguring of performance is able to generate from the viewer

Perhaps another area where difficulty arises regarding the consideration of such issues is in relation to film scholarship's focus – particularly during the 1970s and early 1980s – on constructing and analysing film as a textual system. Drawing upon Christian Metz's work in defining a film language, Roland Barthes's intricate decomposition of Balzac in *S/Z*, and a renewed interest in Freudian psychoanalysis, textual analysis encouraged a close and rigorous engagement with the formal logic of classical film. The insights drawn from these investigations into narrative structure facilitated a number of key debates concerning cinematic spectatorship and the ideological implications of film narrative. In the mid 1980s, the work conducted on the film text was taken up by scholars working in the area of performance.⁶ The understanding of the performance text that

3 James Naremore *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) p. 19

4 Ivone Margulies 'Delaying the cut: the space of performance in *Lightning Over Water*' *Screen* vol. 34 no. 1 (1993) pp. 54–68

5 Miriam Hansen *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship and American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) p. 247

6 The way different approaches to performance deal with the notion of the text is discussed by Graham F. Thompson in 'Approaches to performance' *Screen* vol. 26 no. 5 (1985) p. 79

emerged from this encounter drew attention to how the various codes and structuring oppositions identified by textual analysis were actualized on the level of the actor's performance – in other words, through the coordination of gesture, voice and movement. In this sense, performance is understood as a process which actualizes or gives body to the text.⁷

In this paper I wish to shift the focus slightly by considering a number of responses – both my own and those of others – to the performances in Cassavetes's films. Rather than proposing a critique of the founding assumptions or value of textual analysis, I want to reflect on the type of cinema that emerges when the distinction between character and actor is placed in doubt. The motivation for this paper is that while textual analysis endeavoured to negotiate and work through a range of critical concepts that could be used to interpret film as a specific system of codes, signs and structures, it tended to underplay the ways in which film may exceed or go beyond being a textual construct. Thomas Elsaesser's remarks – quoted at the beginning of this paper – put forward the understanding that, given the considerable history of film as both a cultural phenomenon and an object of study, it has become increasingly important to consider the way the cinema plays upon, and seeks to activate, a range of different responses and affects that run counter to the objective of positioning film as a textual system. This is particularly crucial in thinking about how we respond to performance. It is necessary to stress that in the reflections that follow I do not wish to suggest that there is an unmediated connection between character and actor in Cassavetes's films. It is rather that character and person in these films are continually crossing over, thereby eroding attempts to locate the perimeters of the performance text.

It is her and it is not her

In her study of the American cinema of the 1970s, Diane Jacobs claims that '[t]he most distinguishing quality of Cassavetes's peculiar brand of realism is its Pirandellian flavour'.⁸ Jacobs argues that while it is possible to appreciate a John Wayne film, for instance, 'without taking into consideration the actor's right-wing politics . . .',⁹ in Cassavetes's films one is continually confusing 'the viscera if not the intellect of character and player'.¹⁰ She goes on to explain her point by referring to the performance of Gena Rowlands in *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974). Jacobs proposes that while she does not wish to intimate that Gena Rowlands is Mabel,

[*A Woman Under the Influence*] coaxes us to believe that if Rowlands were a lower-middle-class housewife, she would

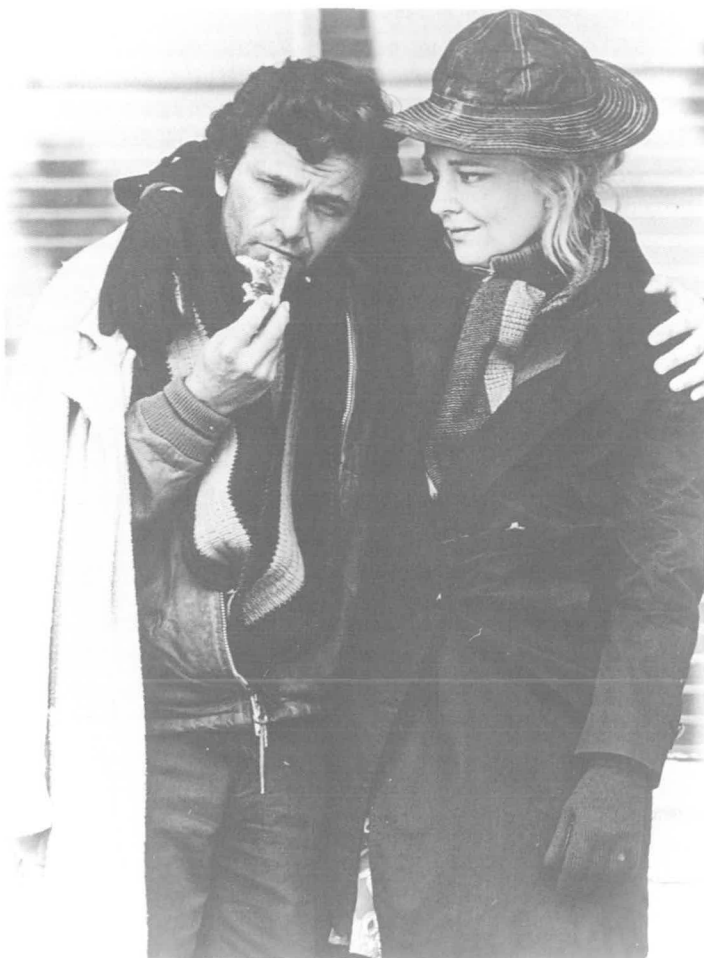
7 See for instance Barry King 'Articulating stardom' *Screen*, vol. 26 no. 5 (1985), and Thompson 'Approaches to performance'

8 Diane Jacobs *Hollywood Renaissance* (South Brunswick: A. S. Barnes, 1977) p. 29

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

Peter Falk and Gena Rowlands.
A Woman Under the Influence
 (1974). Picture courtesy:
 BFI Stills.



probably behave in a comparable fashion. . . . It is in the shady area between life and fiction that Cassavetes's films are both most effective and most disquieting – less than myth and more than fact.¹¹

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

More recently, David Thomson refers to this indistinguishability of actor and character in order to damn Cassavetes's films. After claiming that Cassavetes "indulges" his actors, he doesn't direct them,¹² he makes an interesting observation regarding Rowlands's performance in *A Woman Under the Influence*: 'Gena Rowlands is so moving and pathetic . . . yet I'm not sure that her part actually deserves a movie. Or is a movie.'¹³ This uncertainty gestures to a type of cinematic performance that seems to pressure traditional categories of filmic representation. While Gena Rowlands is not Mabel, neither does her performance in *A Woman Under the*

¹² David Thomson, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema* (London: André Deutsch, 1994), p. 117

¹³ *Ibid.*

Influence seem fiction. It is the impossibility of deciding between these two alternatives which unsettles Thomson and leads him to suggest that there is something uncinematic about Cassavetes's film

Thomson's description of Rowlands's performance evokes a crisis of belief that is central to cinema's fascination. Referring to the dilemma caused when film attempts to recreate historical figures and events, Jean-Louis Comolli argues that the certainty we have when we go to the cinema that 'the spectacle is not life nor the film reality, that the actor is not the character . . . is a certainty we have to be able to doubt'.¹⁴ The only value of this certainty 'is that it is put at risk: it only interests us if it can (temporarily) be abolished'.¹⁵ Comolli goes on to describe this as 'a double game' it is him and it is not, always and at the same time. Neither of the terms ever really prevails over the other, each keeps the other as a ground against which it stands out.¹⁶ These observations affirm the way cinematic performance is able to generate different and competing regimes of belief. While we know that character and actor are different, in order for the fiction to take effect we must also be able to put this knowledge to one side. It is precisely this aspect of suspended disbelief that textual analysis tended to bypass in order to concentrate on the visible codes and structures at work in a film. This concentration served to reveal the rhetorical complexities at work in film narrative; yet it also took something away from our understanding of the way filmic performance is able to fascinate and engage its audience.

Thomson's description of Rowlands's performance plays out the double game perfectly: it is her and it is not her, always and at the same time. This pronounced ambivalence also suggests that far from being hostile to questions of theory, as Cassavetes's work is usually portrayed, his films are explicitly concerned with the situation of cinema and, more precisely, with the status of cinematic performance, where it resides and how we respond to it.

Where does it happen?

In 1992 a book on Cassavetes's career called *Autoportraits* was published in France.¹⁷ This book consists of an extended interview with the director conducted by Ray Carney, a short but very interesting preface by André S. Labarthe, and over a hundred pages of photographs and film stills taken from Cassavetes's films and personal life. In one of these photographs, Cassavetes has his arm around Ben Gazzara's shoulders while Gazzara leans against him. The lighting in the photograph just barely illuminates the two men and the puffs of smoke which create swirling clouds around their heads. In front of Cassavetes and Gazzara are half-drunk glasses of beer. Those familiar with Cassavetes's work will immediately

¹⁴ Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Historical fiction: a body too much' *Screen*, vol. 19 no. 2 (1978), p. 45

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 48

¹⁷ *Autoportraits* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1992)

Peter Falk, Ben Gazzara and John Cassavetes. *Husbands* (1970). Picture courtesy: BFI Stills.



recognize the film as *Husbands* (1970) and the location as the bar where Harry (Gazzara's character), Gus (Cassavetes) and Archie (played by Peter Falk) retreat after the funeral of a friend. It is at this bar that the three friends organize a riotous singing contest that spins out of control and almost engulfs the whole film.

Apart from its obvious pictorial qualities, my interest with this photograph stems from an inability to decide whether it is a film still, a photograph taken from the actual film or some other moment during the filming of *Husbands* – a spontaneous moment of affection between Gazzara and Cassavetes fortuitously captured by the photographer's camera. Like many other photographs taken on the film sets over the years, the photograph of the two men suggests an inbetween space that is not outside the fiction of the film, yet neither is it simply contained by it, a space where actor and character have neither completely fused nor can they be easily separated. Instead, these two figures engage in a kind of perpetual haunting or ghosting of each other.

The value of *Autoportraits* lies not only in its ability to illuminate the spectral existence of the actor – as I have suggested, one can witness this haunting in many photographs belonging to this genre or style.¹⁸ More importantly, it shows us why this effect is so central to discussions of Cassavetes's films. *Autoportraits* provides a kind of reply or indirect response to the concerns raised by Jacobs and Thomson. This reply takes the form of a question identified by Labarthe in his preface to *Autoportraits*: 'Where does it happen?'.¹⁹ In other words, at what point does the actor cross into the character and the performance become separated from the life around it? Once

¹⁸ See, for instance, the photographs in *Magnum Cinema*, introduction by Alain Bergala, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

¹⁹ André S. Labarthe, 'Cassavetes en flagrant délit', in *Autoportraits*, p. 8.

this question is posed, other questions about our ability to locate and read cinematic performance begin to open up. If we are unable to say where it is happening, then what type of characterization emerges through performance? Indeed, how does such a disturbance affect our understanding of the difference between character and actor? Rather than directly addressing these questions, Cassavetes's films seem to circle around them, provoking them and examining the consequences that arise.

Exorbitant expenditure

In his essay 'Body, voice', Stephen Heath poses the question 'Films are full of people, but what is this "fullness" of people in films?'²⁰ He then proceeds to break down the 'presence of people' in cinema by theorizing a number of key categories such as person, character and agent. While character and agent are understood in relation to the accomplishment and bringing together of a series of narrative acts, the person is 'the individual who actualizes – is the support for, plays, represents – agent and character, in the cinema of the narrative fictional film this individual is almost invariably an actor or actress'.²¹ These categorizations clear the ground for an examination of the different ways films play on the distinction between character and person to create a complex circuit of meaning. One of the most familiar ways is through the practice of typecasting or 'the placing of the person totally in terms of the character'.²² A very different emphasis is achieved when the person is given priority over the character. For instance, in *Touch of Evil* (1958) Zsa Zsa Gabor plays the madam of a striptease club but 'appears very much as herself, as Zsa Zsa Gabor; Julie Christie is introduced into *Nashville* (1975) as Julie Christie'.²³ According to Heath, what emerges in these examples is 'the person as persona, the person as image, as – precisely cinema; the living body of the human being exhausted in, converted to that'.²⁴ Understood in this way, the play of person over character is actually contained by the demands of the fiction; in other words, the 'persona' mobilized by the presence of Zsa Zsa Gabor or Julie Christie reaffirms the fiction created by the narrative by drawing on the audience's awareness of the performer through publicity and biography. If we follow Heath's argument, the casting of Gabor and Christie binds the viewer all the more firmly into the fictional world of the film. These examples, however, represent only one part of the story concerning the relationship between character and person.

In Cassavetes's films the emphasis on person over character proceeds in a very different manner, and generates a very different effect. The living body of the actor coming to us as image is never completely exhausted as persona or image. Instead we find a strong sense of what could be termed as the extracinematic, conveyed

²⁰ Stephen Heath, 'Body, voice', in *Questions of Cinema* (London: Macmillan 1981), p. 178

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 180

²² *Ibid.* p. 181

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

through the unpredictability of the human body which is continually generating movements, actions and gestures that exceed, or at the very least divert, the demands of characterization and the drama. It may be more accurate to say that what emerges during these moments is not something extracinematic but *precisely* the cinematic as it is constructed in and through Cassavetes's work. This understanding manifests itself during those moments when the director holds a shot for a few seconds longer than seems necessary, as evidenced in the shot, towards the end of *Love Streams*, of Sarah and the cab-driver looking at her menagerie of animals. The camera remains focused on the cab-driver after Sarah has moved out of the frame and long after his initial bewildered response has been registered. During such moments we are presented with 'dead time' – an expenditure of energy and film stock that in narrative terms contributes little to our understanding of the characters, their motivations or problems. It is at this juncture, when, to borrow a phrase used by Antonioni, 'everything already seems to have been said', that what critics bluntly dismiss as evidence of Cassavetes's penchant for improvisation reveals itself as a deliberate attempt to open the performance of character up to resonances, questions and points of view which cannot be answered or contained by the narrative. Cassavetes uses these fragments of dead time to test the limits of character by exploring the pressures and relations which surround the performance of the drama but are usually excluded from the final print. His films open up an economy of character and performance that exceeds the requirements of narrative causality and the way persona has been understood to function.

Home movies

In the photographs in *Autoportraits* which record the production of Cassavetes's films and everyday events in his private life we see a man never at rest, continually moving, gesturing and engaging with his actors, members of his family and those around him. These images provide a kind of off-stage mirroring of the restlessness and constant movement which continually destabilizes the drama within the films. The sense of a mingling of film and life is reinforced by Cassavetes's well-known habit of continually using his house as one of the central locations in his films, and his fondness for employing as actors his wife, his children, his parents and in-laws. As a working method, the use of his own house, family and friends obviously served to reduce the cost of his films. It also contributed, however, to the films being tagged by critics as 'home movies'. A poster for *Minnie and Moskowitz* (1971) cites Joseph Gelmis's description of the film as 'the best, most charming . . . home movie ever made'.

On first glance this labelling of Cassavetes's work as home movies is typical of the kind of patronising treatment his work has often received in the USA. Yet on reflection this term captures something quite fundamental about the films. Cassavetes's films are home movies or family diaries in the sense that one witnesses a constant process of interpenetration whereby the film becomes a family and the family becomes a film. Let me be clear that I am not saying that Cassavetes's films are autobiographical reflections on his family life. I wish instead to draw attention to the way that the family is never just an important theme or subject; it serves as a generating force for the fictions and roles explored within the films. This understanding is reflected in an interview conducted just after the completion of *Faces* (1968):

At the beginning of *Faces*, as with *Shadows* [1959], we didn't have much to say. But after three years, we had lots to say. . . . My wife Gena, who was in the film, was pregnant while we were shooting. . . . One of the other actresses was pregnant, too. Between the end of the shooting and the day we began cutting, Lynn Carlin had two children. Lots of things happened during this film.²⁵

In Cassavetes's films the family – as an extended network of personal and professional relationships that circulate both across the films and 'outside' them in real life – allows for material contingency (chance, improvisation, the everyday) to inflect the diegetic world of the film. There is no longer the marking out of 'a

²⁵ André S. Labarthe, 'A way of life', interview with John Cassavetes, *Evergreen Review*, no. 64 (March 1969), p. 47.



Gena Rowlands. *Faces* (1968).
Picture courtesy: BFI Stills.

26 Jean-Louis Comolli: Two faces of
Faces in Jim Hillier (ed.)
Cahiers du Cinéma, 1960–1968
New Wave New Cinema
Reevaluating Hollywood
 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard
 University Press, 1986) p. 325

reserved area in space-time, a privileged enclave, protected as it were disinfected, at all events more or less successfully kept away from possible contamination by the real world and the laws of society.’²⁶ As Cassavetes points out, ‘Lots of things happened during this film’ The family also has an important effect in terms of our sense of the temporal dimension of Cassavetes’s work. The family is the *before* and *after* that coexists with the films and which each film serves to reconfigure. This coexistence of a sense of before and after lends the characters what could be described as a virtual presence made up of other roles and fictions, and a sense of the person that exists both before the film and after it has finished. In *Love Streams* this effect is reinforced by the way Robert and Sarah are continually repeating the actions of other characters from previous films. Robert’s behaviour and penchant for tuxedos recalls Cosmo Vitelli in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976) and the three friends in *Husbands*. In her actions and gestures Sarah represents a continuation of earlier characters such as Minnie Moore, Mabel Longhetti and Myrtle Gordon. The connection between Minnie, Mabel and Sarah is made even more explicit by the fact that they are all performed by the same actress, Gena Rowlands.

In this scenario, the activity of performance does much more than actualize a text or flesh out a character that would preexist the performance in the form of a script. It involves the setting in play of a number of different influences, correspondences and temporal registers that erode our attempts to maintain a clear separation between film and life. Viewed in this way, cinematic performance is able to suggest for the viewer an exhilarating sense of freedom and possibility.

Rethinking cinema

I’ve become aware, after fifteen years of cinema, that the real ‘political’ film that I’d like to end up with would be a film about me which would show to my wife and daughter what I am, in other words a home movie.²⁷

27 Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in Colin
 MacCabe: *Godard: Images*
Sounds Politics (London: British
 Film Institute, 1980) p. 23

These words belong not to Cassavetes but to another exponent of the home movie: Jean-Luc Godard. His reflections highlight a connection between two filmmakers who, in their own very different ways, consistently sought to redefine the possibilities of cinematic practice. In 1965, during the production of *Pierrot le Fou*, Godard told an interviewer that ‘the only great problem with the cinema seems to me more and more . . . when and why to start a shot and when and why to end it’.²⁸ Contrary to James Monaco’s claim that this statement is indicative of a threatening paralysis that was hovering over his work in the mid 1960s, Godard’s remark is part of

28 Jean-Luc Godard in Jean
 Narboni and Tom Milne (eds.)
Godard on Godard (London:
 Secker and Warburg, 1972)
 p. 214

29 James Monaco *The New Wave* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) p. 161

30 Philippe Dubois 'Video thinks what cinema creates: notes on Jean-Luc Godard's work in television and video', in Raymond Bellour (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard: Son+Image* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992) p. 178

31 Jean-Louis Comolli 'Le détour par le direct' in Christopher Williams (ed.), *Realism and the Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980) p. 233

an effort to mark out a new space for cinema, a space in which the separation between film and the events which surround it is no longer certain.²⁹ Philippe Dubois has recently proposed that this is something which continues to motivate Godard's work. Referring to his more recent video essays such as *Soft and Hard* (1986) and *Puissance de le parole* (1988), Dubois proposes that 'What counts for Godard is not to *have made* a film, nor preparing one in the classical sense, with the usual separate and progressive stages; it's rather being always in the process of making one, whether or not he's shooting, whether or not he's editing. For him, making a film is an extensive and total thing: it's being and living . . . seeing and thinking together.'³⁰

Through the destabilizing movement of their films, both Cassavetes and Godard position their work in a kind of no man's land between documentary and fiction, where the question of when and why to start a shot and when and why to end it is continually re-asked. In the work of these two filmmakers cinema is not understood as the elaboration of an autonomous textual system but as a constant erosion of boundaries and distinctions separating character from actor, and film from non-film. This correspondence may seem odd for those who categorize Cassavetes as a naive humanist unconcerned with questions about cinema, and, in a number of important ways, Godard and Cassavetes are indeed very different filmmakers. Cassavetes came to directing through acting, while Godard was writing about cinema before he embarked upon a career as a director. And unlike Godard, Cassavetes never embraced the language of Marxist and semiological discourse. Yet despite these obvious differences, the connection between Cassavetes and Godard is one that has been made by other writers.

In a two-part article published in February and April 1969, Comolli positions these two directors as part of what he terms 'the detour through the direct'. In the type of Direct Cinema represented by the work of Cassavetes, Godard and others,

the point is reached when the cinema is linked to life according to a system which is not one of reproduction, but of reciprocal production, so that the film . . . is simultaneously produced by and produces the events and situations.³¹

Comolli's characterization of the productive aspect of Direct Cinema is valuable in that it expands the issue of Direct Cinema beyond the traditional separation between documentary and fiction. The detour through the direct represents that moment of mutual implication when the process of filming acts upon the material it records and is, in turn, acted upon and constituted by this material. Contrary to the way it is often positioned, Direct Cinema does not involve an attempt to reproduce life or capture a real that would pre-exist it, but is based rather on the productive and affective relation

between the cinema and the events, stories and fictions it constructs. More than a particular genre or set of techniques, Direct Cinema is figured as an epistemology of the way the cinema brings itself into being.

Comolli elaborates his ideas on Direct Cinema in an analysis of *Faces* published in October 1968. In this text he identifies what appears as a process of self-generation whereby the construction of a performance and the fragmented and never fully realized telling of a story take place simultaneously. He argues that the characters in *Faces* are 'not stock characters'.

they are not predetermined, or put there once and for all, arbitrarily, at the beginning of the film; rather, they define themselves gesture by gesture and word by word as the film proceeds. That is to say that they are self-creating – the shooting is the means by which they are revealed, each step forward in the film allowing them a new development in their behaviour, their time span coinciding exactly with that of the film³²

32 Comolli: Two faces of *Faces*
p. 326

In *Faces* the work of constructing a fiction and piecing together a performance is not relegated to an offscreen time and space prior to the film's commencement; it lies at the very heart of the drama presented. The representation of Cassavetes's characters as performers is evidenced near the beginning of the film when Freddie and Richard attempt to impress Jeannie with their old college routines. During this scene, the camera is positioned just to the right of where Jeannie is sitting watching the performance. The camera serves to create a visual field or stage across which the performances take place. When the camera moves or shifts its perspective it is usually to follow the movements of the actor or isolate a particular expression in closeup. For most of the time, it is almost impossible to decipher or follow the logic behind the antics of Richard and Freddie. The characters are continually interrupting and yelling over each other; each person seems to be trying to out-do or out-perform the other. Later this scene will be echoed when Richard and Joe McCarthy – another of Jeannie's clients – clash at Jeannie's apartment. After engaging in a hopelessly ineffectual bout of fisticuffs, Joe tries to get the better of Richard by telling a series of jokes. Each time Joe begins a joke, Richard provides him with the punch line or stops him in his tracks.

Joe: Hey, you ever hear the one about the fag motorcycle driver?

Richard: Yeah, I heard that one.

Joe: Well, how about the one about the little Jewish agent who was . . .

Richard: 'Not necessarily'. I heard that one, too.

Jackson: Hey, why don't you tell him that one about 'probably'?

Joe: Oh, come on. You gave the punch line away. What's the matter with you?

Richard: I heard that one.

The emphasis in this scene, as in many others in Cassavetes's films, is not on the gradual uncovering of a particular truth about the characters but on the endless *movement* of formulating and reformulating identity. Maria Viera puts this same point another way when she notes that while Cassavetes's films are not improvised, 'improvization is what his work is about'.³³ Viera's observation recognizes within Cassavetes's work an acute awareness of, and concentration on, the processes through which the films and the characters they present come into being. *Faces* demands that we are attentive to the work of acting – not in the sense of a bravura display of fictional recreation, nor as a detached and self-conscious form of metacommentary on the film, but as a process whereby character and 'stage' emerge through a constant movement of invention and recreation

33 Maria Viera, 'The work of John Cassavetes: script, performance style and improvization', *Journal of Film and Video* no. 42 (Fall 1990), p. 35

A whole work of lies

In examining the way Cassavetes's films reconsider the operations of performance it is useful to look at the work of another filmmaker whose films are renowned for their traversal of documentary and fictional styles, Jean Rouch. Beginning in 1946, Rouch's films are seen to have played a major role in the development of the modern French cinema and in particular in the work of the *nouvelle vague*.³⁴ In a 1968 interview, Jacques Rivette asserts that 'Rouch is the force behind all French cinema of the past ten years. . . . In a way, Rouch is more important than Godard in the evolution of the French cinema'.³⁵ Nearly all of Rouch's work is related to his career as an ethnological researcher for the National Centre for Scientific Research in Paris. As a discursive practice, ethnographic film has been seen to function as an objective record of a culture or people for posterity. By definition, this assumes an effacement of the means of production and the role played by the filmmaker in influencing and shaping the events recorded. In a number of ways, however, Rouch's films stand outside such a conception. Most importantly, they do not seek to capture an unmediated record of a culture or people. Instead, they tend to concentrate on, and openly acknowledge, the process of filming and the effect this has upon both the filmmaker and those being filmed. In *La Pyramide humaine* (1959), which is concerned with the clash of cultures in a West African high school, Rouch includes sequences where the participants watch rushes of the film they are in and give their opinions on the progress of the filmmaking. This device is also used in *Chronique d'un été* (1960), which includes a closing sequence where Rouch and

34 The best account in English of Rouch's films and influence is Mick Eaton (ed.), *Anthropology-Reality-Cinema: the Films of Jean Rouch* (London: British Film Institute 1979)

35 Jacques Rivette 'Time overflowing' Rivette in interview with Jacques Aumont, Jean Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni and Sylvie Pierre in Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma 1960-1968* p. 320

his codirector Edgar Morn are shown ruminating over the relative successes and failures of their joint project

Rouch's films also redefine traditional ethnographic film practice in that, like Cassavetes's films, they are continually engaging with issues of fiction and performance at the levels of both filmic practice and in the lives of the people and characters they are filming and simultaneously constructing. For Rouch, there is no antinomy between ethnographic cinema and aesthetic manipulation:

In *Moi, un noir* [1957] I wanted to show an African city – Treichville. I could have made a documentary full of figures and observations. That would have been deathly boring. So I told a story with characters, their adventures and their dreams. And I didn't hesitate to introduce the dimension of the imaginary, of the unreal – when a character dreams he's boxing, he boxes. The whole problem is to maintain a certain sincerity towards the spectator, never to mask the fact that this is a film.³⁶

Rouch's concern to inscribe the elements of performance within his work stems from his belief that ethnographic inquiry can never be objective: 'Most people refuse to recognize that any anthropology must destroy what it investigates'. The fundamental problem of all social sciences is that the facts are always distorted by the presence of the person who asks the question.³⁷ Rather than trying to find ways to minimize this distortion, Rouch believes that the presence of the camera should be valued as a way of inducing people to act and put on a performance. Through this process of fiction-making, he claims to be able to capture a much more profound aspect of human behaviour than that captured by a discreet or 'Living Camera'.³⁸ The process of filming is framed as part of a 'whole work of lies' that are 'more real than the truth'.³⁹ It is 'no longer a matter of pretending that the camera isn't there', but, as Jean-André Fieschi eloquently puts it, of

transforming [the camera's] role by asserting its presence, by stressing the part it plays, by turning a technical obstacle into the pretext for revealing new and astonishing things. A matter of creating, through the very act of filming itself, an entirely new conception of the notion of the filmic event.⁴⁰

Fieschi's description has important implications for an understanding of Cassavetes's films and the space of performance in them. As with the films of Rouch, in Cassavetes's work the camera does not seek to unearth or construct an underlying identity but rather to provoke a fiction, a becoming-identity. In a number of the photographs in *Autoportraits* we see how he would often use a hand-held Arriflex camera to shoot as close as possible to the action. These photographs capture the physical intimacy between the filmmaker (who would often be the one behind the camera) and the

³⁶ Jean Rouch quoted in Eaton (ed.) *Anthropology-Reality-Cinema* p. 8

³⁷ Ibid. p. 48

³⁸ This term was coined by the American documentary filmmaker Richard Leacock. It refers to Leacock's desire to make the camera as unobtrusive as possible during the process of filming.

³⁹ Jean Rouch quoted in Eaton (ed.) *Anthropology-Reality-Cinema* p. 51

⁴⁰ Jean-André Fieschi 'Slippages of fiction' in Eaton (ed.) *Anthropology-Reality-Cinema* p. 74

drama being filmed. Through the mobility offered by the hand-held camera, Cassavetes was able to place himself in the midst of his performers. In *Faces*, although the camera remains a third party, its presence is never neutral. We are continually made aware of its biases and exclusions, and also its role as a catalyst for initiating and provoking the performances. Thus it is not just the characters who are framed as performers, but also the camera that engages with, and is affected by, the material it simultaneously records and constructs

In Cassavetes's films, the performance of character and identity continually escapes our attempts at closure. As in Rouch's documentary work, what remains are a series of performances and fictions determined by and for the gaze of an implicated and inquisitive observer. Here we might pause to note that whereas Rouch stages this process of fiction-making and becoming within real communities, the communities within Cassavetes's films are fictional to begin with. But, as my previous comments on the role of family suggest, even on this point the distinction is easily unsettled. For Cassavetes, as for Rouch, performance is what comes between cinema and real life. It is what both enables and disturbs the distinction between these two terms.

The presence of people

As a way of concluding, I want to turn to an infamous and often-quoted remark made by Cassavetes just after the release of *Faces*: 'When I make a film – and this is especially true of *Shadows* and my latest film, *Faces*, which we worked on for more than three years – I am more interested in the people who work with me than the film itself, than I am in filmmaking'.⁴¹ Cassavetes's provocative remark should not be taken as meaning that he regards the film as unimportant. For Cassavetes, it is only through its engagements with people – the actors, his family, his friends – that the cinema gains meaning or form. His work is based on the revelations, performances and insights that arise when film engages with, and is affected by, the life around it. These films point to another understanding of Heath's observation that 'Films are full of people'. More than just serving as the support for narrative agents and characters, in Cassavetes's films 'the people' become synonymous with a type of cinematic performance that, as Gilles Deleuze puts it, is 'always outside its marks, breaking with "the right distance", always overflowing "the reserved zone" where we would like to hold it in space and time'.⁴² It is this uncontainable model of performance, and the different regimes of fascination and disbelief to which it gives rise, that text-based approaches to film have difficulty in accounting for, and which Cassavetes's films force us to reconsider.

41 Labarthe 'A way of life' p. 47

42 Gilles Deleuze *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) p. 154

Narratives of resistance: national identity and ambivalence in the Turkish melodrama between 1965 and 1975

NEZİH ERDOĞAN

National cinema and an identity in crisis

One of the first Turkish feature films, *Murebbiye/The Tutor* (Ahmet Fehim, 1919)¹ was banned by the allied forces which had occupied Istanbul just after World War I. It was adapted from Huseyin Rahmi Gurpinar's novel of the same title, published in 1898. *Murebbiye* tells the story of a French woman who seduces the members of a snobbish family she works for. Apparently the text was meant to give a comical illustration of the upper classes' infatuation with French culture. But the film was released in the context of the occupation of Istanbul by the allied forces, and by then the focus was on the corrupt French tutor who, more or less, represented western woman. Domestic film circles read *Murebbiye* as Turkish cinema's 'silent resistance' to occupation.² What is more interesting is that the censor for the allied forces banned the film on the same grounds.

Woman as the site of production of meaning is one of the issues that I will discuss in this essay. For now, I would like to point out that the expression 'silent resistance' is somewhat problematic here. To the Turkish eye, the cinema was a western form of entertainment right from the start. Sigmund Weinberg, a Polish Jew of Romanian nationality, launched the first regular public screenings in Istanbul in

1 The large majority of the films cited in this essay were not released in English-speaking countries. I am however adding my own English translation of the original titles to give an idea of their content.

2 Nijat Özön: *Fuat Uzkınay* (Istanbul: TSD 1970) cited in Giovanni Scognamiglio: *Türk Sinema Tarihi 1896-1986* (Istanbul: Metis 1987) p. 28.

1896. These were Lumière shorts, *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat* (1895) among them. Weinberg also made some documentaries and was reputed to be an 'expert' in cinematography. Soon, companies such as Lumière, Pathé, Gaumont and Ciné Théâtrale d'Orient began to distribute French, American, German and Danish films. In the beginning, the audience of these films consisted mostly of the non-Muslim minorities who lived in Pera (now Beyoğlu), a district of Istanbul marked by a western life style. D. Henri screened films in a pub named 'Sponeck'; Matalon, another Jew, in the 'Luksemburg Buildings'; and Camdon, probably a Lumière man, in 'Varyete Theatre' – all places with western names. In addition, publicity was printed in French, German, Armenian and Greek but not in Turkish. Pera was posed as an object of desire for the Muslim upper class and, partly, for the intelligentsia at a time of modernization fuelled by western-oriented policies, and the cinema seems to have served as the latest desiring machine – the films that were shown presented glamorous scenes from various European centres, and filmgoing itself had the charm of being a western-style ritual.³

Murebbiye is not the only example of a national cinema that produces a discourse of resistance while a general perception of cinema itself was already constructed entirely in western terms. And it is not surprising that, as far as national cinemas are concerned, any formulation of resistance is overshadowed by images of mimicry. Turkish popular cinema, Yeşilçam, whose death was announced in the early 1980s, had been frequently criticized for imitating other cinemas, and repeating other films.⁴ Back in 1968, the film magazine *Yeni Sinema* (*New Cinema*) noted that more than half of the 250 films made that year were adaptations – plagiarisms, to be more precise – of foreign box-office successes.⁵ Given this fact, one can easily deduce an identity crisis, but what are we to make of an identity which is in permanent crisis? And what kind of national identity can be formed from a cinema renowned for its failures rather than its successes, or for its endless efforts to mimic others rather than to produce films that are 'Turkish to the core'?

In this essay I will examine the dynamics by which Turkish popular cinema describes a national identity, and I will attempt to demonstrate how the specificity of this identity can be seen in the very way it mimics and resists others. Cinema, as a desiring machine, produces a discourse which operates on a social level, involving psychical processes with subject effects. I will argue that these psychical processes are characterized by ambivalence (for example, mimicry and resistance) which provides a ground for the 'identity in crisis' I refer to above. In this respect, I will make use of postcolonial theory, particularly its formulation of the ambivalent nature of colonial discourse and the way it operates on the social unconscious. However, I am not going to offer an analysis of

3 Nilgün Abisel gives a detailed account of how intellectuals debated the tension between foreign films and cultural identity in her work *Türk Sineması Üzerine Yazılar* (Ankara: İmge, 1994).

4 Yeşilçam is a street in Istanbul where film production companies gathered until a decade ago. It also denotes a specific system of production–distribution–exhibition that dominated the Turkish cinema between the late 1950s and mid 1980s.

5 İkilem yanlış konunca: *Yeni Sinema* nos 19/20 (June/July 1968) p. 3.

colonial discourse as such, rather I will focus on 'the discourse of the national identity as derivative of colonial discourse' as articulated by Yeşilçam.⁶ Indeed, Turkish popular cinema is one popular site where such an 'identity in crisis' has been experienced for decades.

My study covers the period when commercial cinema enjoyed its heyday – that is, between the mid 1960s and mid 1970s – producing an average of two hundred films per year. *Konfeksiyon* films, as they were called, were made in a rush to meet a continuously increasing demand.⁷ Not only did they entertain the domestic audience, they also became very popular in other Middle Eastern countries, such as Iran, Iraq and Egypt. Production declined dramatically after the 1980s, and today only about ten Turkish films reach the movie theatres each year. This is primarily due to the US film distribution companies that now control exhibition mechanisms in Turkey, and secondly to the gap between the audience and the inaccessible discourse of current Turkish films, many of which follow the conventions of European art cinema. The new Turkish cinema has lost its audience to television channels which repeatedly show old popular films – the frequency of commercial breaks suggests that these films still appeal to a mass audience, still contribute to popular imagery.

Turkish popular cinema: a field of tensions

The first three decades of Turkish cinema were marked by the domination of a single man, Muhsin Ertuğrul, who was, and is still, widely criticized for transferring the stylistic devices of theatre to cinema. This period came to an end in 1953, when a number of filmmakers initiated a somewhat different practice. Ayşe Şasa, a veteran scriptwriter, calls this the period of the 'illiterates', in that they were neither aware of, nor interested in, the artistic possibilities of the cinema. Craftsmen of rural and lumpen origin now ruled Yeşilçam. They did not hide their commercial interest in the films from which they made big profits. Şasa maintains that the period of the 'illiterates' in Turkish cinema was undervalued because of its low-quality films: its potential of growing a genuine cinematic 'seed' was underestimated, as was 'the poetry that was hidden in this artless authenticity'.⁸

The mid 1960s witnessed the beginning of a debate about national identity in Turkish cinema. A group of writers from various branches of literature gathered around the film magazine *Yeni Sinema*, and founded the Turkish cinematheque (with some help from Henri Langlois). They argued that a national cinema with international concerns was impossible within Yeşilçam, which was associated with worn-out formulas, plagiarism, escapism and exploitation. While *Yeni Sinema* published interviews with film directors such as Godard,

6 I borrow this expression from the title of a book by Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and Colonial World: a Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

7 Daytime women only screenings were part of a strategy developed by the movie theatres to regulate this demand.

8 Ayşe Şasa, *Yeşilçam Günüğü* (İstanbul: Dergah, 1993) p. 30.

Renoir and Antonioni, and translations from theoretical works examining cinema in relation to other arts, screenings organized by the cinemathèque gave a particular audience access to canons of European art cinema. When one looks back at this scene, one can see a programme aiming at an art cinema. If, in Europe, art cinema developed as a resistance to the increasing domination of Hollywood, in Turkey, Yeşilçam appeared as the first obstacle to be tackled; alternative modes of production were sought, and festivals and competitions held to promote short films.⁹

9 Ece Ayhan, a famous poet evaluated the contributors to a short film competition 'This Young Generation of honour has chosen to work away from Yeşilçam in order not to fall prey to it' *Simurg Yeni Sinema* nos 19/20 (June/July 1968), p 10

When the Asiatic mode of production championed by the novelist Kemal Tahir became a popular issue in the late 1960s, a close friend of his, the then film critic and promising film director Halit Refiğ, elaborated a concept of national cinema. films are made by money coming *from* the people, so they must be made *for* the people, one way or another. Since it is impossible to reach the people of Turkey via western forms, a cinema which considers the people's characteristics and needs must be developed within Yeşilçam, which already has formed its audience. Refiğ insisted that Yeşilçam relied less on a capitalist mode of production than on a labour-intensive one, and urged film writers and producers not to turn their backs on it. He used ironic language when he criticized the elitist approach of the cinemathèque group:

To sum up, cinema [according to the group of cinemathèque] is a universal art. The criteria for the evaluation of this art are provided by the West. To be able to make a good film, one must do whatever a western filmmaker would do. There is no point in taking an interest in Turkish films as they do not subscribe to western criteria . . . and one must fight to have the Turkish audience develop a sympathy for and to love films coming from the West.¹⁰

10 Halit Refiğ, *Ulusal Sinema Kavgası* (İstanbul: Hareket, 1971), p 47

In 1967 the major film directors of the time refused to respond to a questionnaire on the role of criticism prepared by *Yeni Sinema*, and that was the end of relations between filmmakers and the cinemathèque.¹¹ Here is a list of keywords which represent the two cinemas (one of which was only a programme then)

11 'We refuse to collaborate with the Turkish cinemathèque and its publication *Yeni Sinema* for their hostility to the Turkish cinema in general and Turkish filmmakers in particular' Memduh Ün, Atıf Yılmaz, Metin Erksan, Lütfi Akad, Duygu Sagiroğlu, Alp Zeki Heper, Osman Seden, Halit Refiğ, *Yeni Sinema* no 4 (July 1967) p 34

New Cinema

western
art cinema
model: European art cinema
to create
auteur policy
alternative modes of production
festivals, competitions

Yeşilçam

domestic
popular cinema
model: Hollywood
to produce
star system
capitalist mode of production
production–distribution–exhibition

Inevitably, the sharp conflict in this set of oppositions was occasionally resolved by some directors. Yılmaz Güney, for instance,

produced popular, commercially successful films which were also hailed by the cinemathèque group. At the beginning of the 1980s, New Cinema began to introduce its first films to the domestic audience (and to international film circles), but it could not get out of the domain of Yeşilçam entirely. At first *Yeni Sinema* attempted to win over some established directors, Lutfi Akad and Yılmaz Güney among them. Then came a generation of young filmmakers who tried hard to differentiate their films from those of popular cinema, although they made these films in Yeşilçam, they sought recognition from international art cinema institutions. In Yeşilçam, stars were used to brand the film product, the New Cinema directors also worked with stars but, following auteur policy, the director was inscribed as the 'creator' of the film. Audiences began to read authorial credits, such as 'an Ali Ozgenturk film', 'an Ömer Kavur film'. In addition, the New Cinema assumed the point of view of European art cinema (which includes the European audience) in that it produced representations of Turkey either as an 'impenetrable other' (*Hazal, Bedrana, Kumal/The Concubine*) or as a fantasmatic western country (*Piano Piano Bacaksız/Piano Piano My Little Boy, Seni Seviyorum Rosa/I Love You Rosa, Yengeç Sepeti/The Crab Basket, Gizli Yüz/The Secret Face*). It is interesting to note that a British film critic, reporting from an Istanbul Film Festival in 1992, describes the latter films as 'pretentious allegories drawing on influences from Buñuel to Bergman'.¹²

The mid 1970s witnessed television and sociopolitical catastrophe pushing Yeşilçam into another crisis, while New Cinema continued to seek its audience by way of international festivals and other such events. Thomas Elsaesser makes a similar observation about German cinema in the early 1980s:

the Germans are beginning to love their own cinema because it has been endorsed, confirmed and benevolently looked at by someone else: for the German cinema to exist, it first had to be seen by non-Germans. It enacts, as a national cinema now in explicitly economic and cultural terms, yet another form of self-estranged exhibitionism.¹³

To echo Elsaesser in a slightly different context, for Turkish art cinema to exist, it had to be 'endorsed, confirmed and benevolently looked at' by some one else. But unlike German cinema, with a few exceptions it never enjoyed such recognition. What was expected from German cinema was, for instance, the sophisticated, self-reflexive films of Fassbinder. This has not been the case for Turkish cinema. *Susuz Yaz/The Dry Summer* (Metin Erksan) and *Yol* (Yılmaz Güney), which won prizes at major festivals, both illustrate the harsh circumstances of rural life stricken with poverty, absurd moral values, oppressed individuals, and so on. Roy Armes's comment on

¹² John Gillet *Sight and Sound*
vol. 2 no. 4 (1992), p. 5

¹³ Thomas Elsaesser 'Primary
identification and the historical
subject' Fassbinder and
Germany *Cine-Tracts* vol. 3
no. 3 (1982) p. 52

the relationship between the Third-World cinema and intelligentsia is relevant here.

But the processes of their education and the advent of national independence will have made them very aware that they cannot become western filmmakers. Hence they will tend to prove their identity by plunging deeply into local tradition, myth and folklore. The result is all too often an ambiguous cinema which is too complex in form for local audiences and too esoteric in substance for western spectators.¹⁴

14 Roy Armes 'Twelve propositions on the inaccessibility of third world cinema' in Christine Woodhead (ed.) *Turkish Cinema an Introduction* (London: Turkish Area Study Group Publications 1989) p. 7

That 'they cannot become western filmmakers' needs further elaboration. I want to demonstrate that fetishism and, relatedly, fantasy complicate things further. Indeed, Turkish film directors are very well aware that they cannot become western filmmakers, but the fetishistic disavowal of difference keeps them moving in the same direction (to adapt the famous 'I know very well but nevertheless', 'I am very well aware that I cannot become a western film maker, but nevertheless...') The problem is not in knowing but in doing, as Slavoj Žižek maintains:

They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the ideological fantasy.¹⁵

15 Slavoj Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York and London: Verso 1989) pp. 32–3

Turkish art cinema deserves a more detailed analysis, but I want now to return to Yeşilçam and to demonstrate that the dissemination of colonial discourse is not exclusive to New Cinema. I will concentrate upon melodrama as a popular genre which plays on desire, providing us with invaluable insight into the ambivalent nature of national identity.

The identities of melodrama

As Thomas Elsaesser observes, family melodrama,

dealing largely with the same Oedipal themes of emotional and moral identity, more often records the failure of the protagonist to act in a way that could shape the events and influence the emotional environment, let alone change the stifling social milieu. The world is closed, and the characters are acted upon, and each other's sole referent, there is no world outside to be acted on, no reality that could be defined or assumed unambiguously.¹⁶

16 Thomas Elsaesser 'Tales of sound and fury: observations on the family melodrama' in Bill Nichols (ed.) *Movies and Methods* Volume II (London: University of California Press 1985) p. 177

17 Steve Neale 'Melodrama and tears' *Screen* vol. 27 no. 6 (1986) p. 6

Steve Neale notes that 'melodramas are marked by chance happenings, coincidences, missed meetings, sudden conversions, last minute rescues and revelations, *deus ex machina* endings'.¹⁷

18 Elsaesser, 'Tales of sound and fury' p. 168

Melodrama, in short, is perfectly suited to Yeşilçam, which sticks to narrative traditions inspired by legends, fairy tales and epopees (rather than by, say, tragedy, which emphasizes the inner conflicts and transformations of its characters). While, in its beginnings, western melodrama recorded the 'struggle of a morally and emotionally emancipated bourgeois consciousness against the remnants of feudalism',¹⁸ Yeşilçam exploits melodrama in articulating the desires aroused not only by class conflict but also by rural/urban and eastern/western oppositions. Immigration from rural areas to big cities is still a social phenomenon with significant economic and cultural consequences. The possibilities of crossing from one class to another and from village to big city provide the ground upon which melodrama plays and activates its machinery of desire. Hence the formulation lower class/rural = East/local culture vs upper class/urban = West/foreign culture.

The Yeşilçam melodrama repeatedly returns to the 'boy meets girl' plot. They unite, they split, they reunite. In one particular variation, the boy from the urban upper class and the girl from the lower class have an affair and then the boy leaves the girl. The girl finds him again, but learns that he no longer wants her. She comes back in disguise (urban, rich, sophisticated) and the boy, having failed to recognize her, falls in love. This time the girl takes her revenge and leaves him. In the end, her identity is revealed and the boy learns his lesson. The upper class, which is fixed as the object of desire here, is encoded with its western attributes.¹⁹ Luxurious American cars, blondes wearing revealing dresses, crazy parties and whisky all connote moral corruption, and construct an iconography of the West.²⁰ This is in sharp contrast with the virtues (simplicity, loyalty, correctness and chastity) of the woman from the rural area/lower class. In a recurrent plot, the heroine is raped/seduced and immediately deserted by a man whom she already loves. She has a baby and brings it up under reduced circumstances, and then somehow becomes rich. Towards the finale, having come to appreciate the heroine's virtues, the long-lost lover, now father, returns, but the heroine's pride delays the reunion (*Sana Donmeyeceğim/I Will Never Return To You*, *Ayşem/Ayşe Mine*, *Kıvalı Yapıncak/Golden Red Grape*). In *Dağdan İnmel/Came Down From The Mountains* the male hero is struck by the appearance of an extremely attractive woman he meets at a party. She is actually a villager, desperately in love with him. *Taşra Kızı/The Girl From The Province* tells the story of a girl who comes to Istanbul from a small town. She moves into the house of an old family friend, who turns out to be her father. This film, like many others, exemplifies how melodrama resolves conflict using the Father figure (as father, police chief, judge, boss) as its agent.²¹ In many instances the authoritarian Father plays the benefactor, and sides with the girl against the spoiled son. There are, of course, some contradictory variations (for

19 At this point Yeşilçam gets closer to Indian melodrama. Ravi Vasudevan gives an instance of a female character who was sentenced to death for murdering a man but thinks she is already guilty of having adopted customs alien to their land (*Andaz/A Sense of Proportion* [Mehboob Khan 1949]). The melodramatic mode and the commercial Hindi cinema: notes on film history narrative and performance in the 1950s. *Screen* vol. 30, no. 3 (1989) pp. 41–4.

20 Mehmet Açar notes that the innocent girl is always offered a western drink (often whisky) when she is to be seduced. *Felakete çeyrek kala Sinema* (February 1996) p. 88.

21 I thank Mahmut Mutman for drawing my attention to this issue.

example, the rich father making friends with two young men who turn out to be his daughters' boyfriends). Variations, however, do not negate the argument that the Father regulates the economy of desire and power. The message, which is of course addressed to the lower-class/rural subject, is that the upper class will be able to survive only if the lower class helps. Possibilities of identification in these films are a matter of justifying the audience's (especially female audience's) desire for, and wish to be desired by, the upper class. Yeşilçam melodramas thus offered a sense of legitimacy to the squatters who had migrated from rural areas.

Plagiarism, of which Yeşilçam has often been accused, is by no means a simple issue. The technical and stylistic devices of Yeşilçam differ radically from those of Hollywood and European cinema. Lighting, colour, dubbing, dialogue, shooting practices, point-of-view shots and editing create a very specific cinematic discourse in even the most faithful of adaptations. In trying to meet a demand for two hundred films a year, production practices had to run at great speed and thus by default a visual tradition of shadowplays, miniatures, and so on was revived. To save time and money, shot/reverse-shot and other point-of-view shots were avoided as much as possible. This meant the domination of front shots: characters mostly performed facing the camera and did not turn their backs to it. This made full identification impossible and gave way to empathy instead. When a Hollywood film shows a box, it says 'This is a box'. Yeşilçam, on the other hand, attempted to achieve the same statement but could not help saying 'This is supposed to be a box, but actually it is only an image which represents a box'. Yeşilçam was a hybrid cinema: it produced a cinematic discourse blending Hollywood-style realism with an unintentional Brechtian alienation effect.

Characters who were never depicted as individuals, and who could not act but were 'acted upon', reinforced the melodramatic effect. Given such circumstances, it is not difficult to see why split identities have always been convincing for, and appealing to, the audience. The Yeşilçam character can trick her lover into believing that she is someone else, taking on various successive identities. What was once a poor, uneducated girl with a strong accent can instantly become an attractive, sophisticated lady of manners. A girl from the lower class can adapt herself to the rules of the high society she has just joined without any trouble. These are, of course, narrative reproductions of Pygmalion and Cinderella. If we can hazard that splittings are mobilized by presenting the upper class/West to the lower class/East as an object of desire and identification, then splitting is a symptom which betrays Yeşilçam's own conception of national identity. Ambivalence (narcissism/aggression), identification and fantasy are the basic terms of the logic of this conception. Splitting, as a matter of fact, provides the ground for ambivalent psychical positionings of the subject in relation to its

object of desire, and transition from one identity to another takes place in the realm of fantasy after the poor young girl is discovered by the owner of a night club, she quickly becomes a rich and famous singer. The huge efforts required to achieve success (private education from a non-Muslim instructor, music lessons, training, rehearsals) are either shown in a rapid succession of scenes or ignored entirely.

Apollo, molotov cocktail and 'The Favourite of Maharajah'

Now I want to examine a film which, I believe, focuses the problem of national identity as derivative of colonial discourse. *Karagozlum/My Dark Eyed One* (Atif Yılmaz, 1970) is not a typical or normal melodrama; even its plot is different from the ones I have so far described. Rather it is a limit-text, which stands at the margins of the logic of melodrama, and this is why I think it is capable of representing Yeşilçam melodrama perfectly.

Azize (Turkan Şoray) is a fisherman's daughter who enjoys singing while she works in the fish market. She happens to meet Kenan (Kadir Inanır), an idealist composer who disdains all kinds of music but western classical. Teasing him for his pretentious cultural preference she names him 'Chopin'. As in the case of many melodramas, Azize is then discovered by the owner of a music-hall, and becomes a famous singer, finding herself in an entirely different network of sociocultural and economic relations. Kenan, having failed to find a decent job, begins work as a waiter at the same place. They eventually fall in love. Kenan drops classical music in favour of composing popular songs for Azize ('I retire from Chopinhood'). He mails his work anonymously to her, never revealing his identity. Two Hollywood producers who happen to hear her singing one night offer to co-star Azize with Rock Hudson in a film ('The Favourite of Maharajah') on the condition that she will bring her 'unknown composer' along with her to Hollywood. She is delighted with the idea that she will enjoy world-wide fame, but her mysterious, hitherto unknown composer (Kenan disguised as an old man) shows up, and not only declines the offer but also accuses her of 'being adrift in a Hollywood dream'. He deserts Azize and gets engaged to Semra, the daughter of a rich family. Azize, having discovered that 'one who wants to have everything, loses what she already has', quits her job and goes back to selling fish. But, in the end, Kenan reappears and they are reunited.

The film is very quick to establish the opposition of East/popular culture and West/elite culture. In the scene following the opening, Kenan's close friend, Orhan, advises him to drop 'this *kefere* [infidel's] music which is a pain in the neck' and perform his art for a larger audience in order to make a fortune from his talent. Once



Fig. 1. *Karagözüm/My Dark Eyed One* (Asil Yılmaz, 1970).



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

22 Mahmut Mutman, 'Pictures from afar: shooting the middle east', *Inscriptions*, no. 6 (1992), p. 15

Azize starts working at the music-hall she cannot enjoy the new life she is expected to lead. When the vacuum cleaner goes dead in a power cut, she and her assistant happily use brooms. They are almost embarrassed to use mechanical appliances for any kind of housework that can be done manually. Technology not only marks a class conflict here, it also serves as an icon for a western lifestyle.

But the dream sequence is most significant since it reveals the 'intention of the text'. In order to go to Hollywood Azize has to locate her unknown composer, but Kenan is none too happy with her enthusiasm, and is reluctant to give away his secret. As he tries to make his mind up he falls asleep and has a dream. In the dream we see the chamber of the maharajah. Azize enters the scene and begins to dance in front of a man whom we are not allowed to see (fig. 1). Then Kenan sneaks into the chamber through the back door, and becomes furious when he sees Azize dancing for someone else (fig. 2). In response, Azize puts out her tongue in mockery. But what strikes Kenan most is that right behind Azize, accompanying her on the flute, he sees himself, dressed in Indian clothes (fig. 3). Kenan produces a bomb (a molotov cocktail) from the pocket of his coat and throws it right into the middle of the chamber (fig. 4). The bomb explodes and Kenan awakes. He has made his decision: he will not let Azize go to Hollywood.

When Kenan detonates the bomb we do not see any damage done: we do not see the palace falling into pieces, we do not see anybody killed, and we do not hear any screams. We see only a smoke-screen and then, in closeup, Kenan awakening in dismay. What has broken down is not the content of the dream but the fantasy screen itself.

As Mahmut Mutman stresses, colonial discourse and orientalism play on sexual difference. Psychic processes (fantasy, castration, fetishism, aggression) which mobilize the discourse, enable the re-presentation of Woman as a cultural construct: 'Muslim woman stands where the political, the economic and the cultural "values" meet: her culturally specific embodiment is the commodity that is exchanged with other commodities'.²² Which applies to *both* sides (colonized and colonizer) of colonial discourse. In Turkish, *anavatan* and *anayurt*, which might be translated as 'motherland' and 'mother country', are terms which explain how Woman comes to represent values attached to the concept of nationhood. And this is precisely what *Karagözüm* does through the agency of Kenan: Chopin/the unknown composer is asked to trade Azize for a brilliant career (she dances to his music). Azize, an Arabic word in origin, means 'dear' or 'beloved' in Turkish and can easily be associated with the common usage *Aziz Vatan* (beloved country). The molotov cocktail was an icon of the militant Left in the 1970s, frequently used in demonstrations against the growing US hegemony. It was considered an unsophisticated, cheap, easy-to-produce, easy-to-use combat weapon, a suitable device for a 'people at war with imperialism'.

What seems problematic to my analysis at this point is that Kenan's dream actually serves as a screen onto which 'Hollywood' projects its fantasy. It is also the very dream Kenan refers to when he accuses Azize of being adrift in a Hollywood dream

Through his music, Kenan fixes his beloved as an object of desire, and then exhibits her body (that is, hands her over) to Hollywood. More importantly, the splittings of Kenan verify the ambivalence of colonial discourse: there is a Kenan (the flute player) who accompanies Azize with his music, a Kenan (the white male hero) who is struck by what is going on in the scene and explodes the bomb, and finally a Kenan who dreams all of this. I suggest that the dream sequence forms the kernel of the entire film. The splittings that take place within it are parallel to the diegetic ones: the flute player is the unknown composer, now unmasked, the one who bombs the palace is the waiter, and the one who dreams is a Kenan who retired from 'Chopinhood' in favour of Azize. But who is the maharajah? Although we see very little of him, he is a pivotal figure around which the rest of the characters revolve. Motionless, he is watching Azize dancing. It seems he controls the space with his gaze. He can see Azize and the flute player and vice versa. He cannot see the waiter (or the audience), and although the waiter cannot see his face he is very well aware of his presence. So the maharajah is also a borderline separating the waiter and the audience from Azize and the flute player. The audience identifies first with the dreaming Kenan and then with the waiter. When Kenan throws the bomb, he not only puts an end to the dream, but also to the voyeuristic pleasure of the maharajah. The audience of the exotic films of Hollywood shares the erotic experiences of the Oriental despot and then identifies with the white male hero who bursts into the palace and takes the girl away from him. In this connection, the explosion has a double effect which brings us back to the problem of split identities: Kenan tears apart the fantasy screen of 'Hollywood', yet identifies with it by playing the white male hero who is already a part of this same fantasy. Therefore, *Karagozlum* offers us a dual set of relationships which reveal the actual fantasy of the colonized – to share the colonizer's fantasy. This is made possible by a subtle reversal: the narrative switches positions and the colonized becomes someone other than Kenan. Aggression takes place elsewhere, neither the word 'maharajah' nor the setting is Turkish, but it is still Oriental.

Azize and her father ride to the fish market on a shabby motorcycle they have named Apollo. If we go back to 1970, the production date of this film, we can see the reference to the US moon landing. To name an old motorcycle after Apollo is a parody intended as mockery, but as Fredric Jameson emphasizes in a different context, 'the parodist has to have some secret sympathy for the original' and 'there remains somewhere behind all parody the

23 Fredric Jameson 'Postmodernism and consumer society' in Hal Foster (ed.) *Anti aesthetic Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend: Bay Press 1986), pp. 113–14

24 It must be noted that *Karagözlüm* borrows its title from a popular song like many other Turkish films

feeling that there is a . . . norm'.²³ And *Karagözlüm* re-establishes western norms by illustrating cultural deviations. Throughout the film we hear three sorts of music, representing three levels of culture: classical western music (Kenan – the norm), traditional Turkish popular music (Azize – the settlement) and popular dance music (Semra – the corrupt).²⁴ Kenan has to sacrifice classical music (the norm) for Azize and the values she represents (the popular), when he thinks he has lost her to Hollywood, he decides to marry Semra (the corrupt).

My observation is supported by another film. In *Sana Tapıyorum/ I Worship You* (Aram Gulyuz, 1970), Ayşe (Zeynep Değirmencioğlu) studies ballet at a dance school. In order to meet her expenses, her mother works as a singer in a night club, which utterly embarrasses Ayşe. When the rumour is spread that her mother is more or less a prostitute, Ayşe is cut by her classmates and teachers. She drops out of school under pressure and, at the same time, she is informed that her mother is dangerously ill. The doctors tell her that she will die unless she is sent to Switzerland for an operation. Ayşe is desperate because she cannot afford to pay for the operation. Her mother's boss offers her money, but she would have to dance in his night club in return. When Ayşe refuses the offer furiously, he asks ironically whether her body is more sacred than her mother's life, remarking that her mother did the same thing in order to be able to pay her tuition fees, upon which Ayşe agrees to start working in the night club. Ayşe's classmates and teachers appreciate the sacrifice she has made for her mother and decide to help her. In the meantime, Ayşe locates her long-lost father, who was once a famous brain surgeon and is now an alcoholic, and after a climactic speech she persuades him to do the operation. In the final scene we see Ayşe taking the leading role in a ballet performance and all the characters in the audience, especially the owner of the night club regretfully weeping. Her body, as in many Yeşilçam melodramas, is a metaphor for postponement and sacrifice. Once again, Woman provides the ground for an exchange of values. The body which represents the cultural values of the dance school (the norm) is not more sacred than the Mother. It must be sacrificed for the Mother and submitted to the night club. Only then will the Mother survive and the Father assume his identity.

'Pay it to the waiter!'

As I have tried to demonstrate, colonial discourse and its derivatives operate in a vast area, and neither nationalism nor any other sort of anti-western practice can easily avoid reproducing them. For Yeşilçam, the moment of colonial discourse is the moment of transgressing the boundaries it has defined. Yeşilçam depicts the

West performatively; however, it suppresses the fact that the social class which represents the West is represented in fantasmatic scenes where everything can be vindicated and thus desired unashamedly.

One must, nevertheless, not forget that Yeşilçam melodrama stages a real ambivalence in the sense that reversals work both ways. It imposes the cultural values attached to national identity as necessary and temporary deviations. One must conform to them for now so as to acquire the norm (that is the West) in the future. To be able to be Chopin one day, one must be a waiter or an unknown composer now – because Azize is at stake; to be able to go back to the dance school one day, one must work in a night club – because mother is ill and money is required for the operation.

When the Hollywood producers burst into Azize's dressing room to meet her, the owner of the music-hall cannot figure out what they want. 'They want the bill', Azize guesses, and points to Kenan, who happens to be there. 'Pay it to the waiter', she suggests. Kenan's intervention prevents Azize from going to Hollywood, so Hollywood does pay the bill to Yeşilçam in a way. Yeşilçam seems determined to demand a payment, only it cannot avoid reproducing colonial discourse once again, since it fixes national identity precisely in this problematic moment.

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The Celtic blue note: jazz in Neil Jordan's 'Night in Tunisia', *Angel* and *The Miracle*

MARIA PRAMAGGIORE

Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*, a provocative study of how Irish Catholic immigrants, '[who were] an oppressed race in Ireland, became part of an oppressing race in America', begins with a statement made by Frederick Douglass in 1843:

The Irish, who, at home, readily sympathize with the oppressed everywhere, are instantly taught when they step onto our soil to hate and despise the Negro . . . Sir, the Irish-American will one day find out his mistake¹

¹ Noel Ignatiev *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995) p. 1

Neil Jordan, Ireland's most prolific and most internationally prominent filmmaker, complicates Douglass's observation about the ready sympathy of the Irish in a 1993 interview in *Film Ireland*. When questioned about his use of black actors in *Mona Lisa* (1986) and *The Crying Game* (1993) Jordan replies:

I used Forest Whitaker because just about every black British soldier has been to Northern Ireland, where they're subjected to a lot of overt racism. I suppose because Irish people have never liked other minorities²

² 'Celtic dreamer' *Film Ireland* no. 34 (1993) p. 20

This paper aims to map the constellation of identification, objectification, voyeurism, minstrelsy, appropriation and ventriloquism which gives voice and visual form to this sympathy and to this racism. I am interested specifically in contemporary Irish film and its practitioners' obvious fascination with African-American

- 3 See Kevin Rockett 'Culture, industry and Irish cinema' in J. Hill, M. McLoone and P. Hainsworth (eds) *Border Crossing* (Antrim: Institute of Irish Studies/British Film Institute 1994). An Irish film studio in L. Gibbons and J. Hill (eds) *Cinema and Ireland* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 1988).

culture. The history of Irish film culture suggests that the 1980s and 1990s are probably the most important decades for the study of Irish images of Ireland, not least because of economic incentives for indigenous production and opportunities for finance from British and US sources.³ Within the context of an emerging internationalized Irish film culture, filmmakers such as Alan Parker (*The Commitments* [1991], based on Roddy Doyle's novel) and Gillies MacKinnon (*The Playboys* [1992], written by Shane Connaughton and Kerry Crabbe) have made allusions to African-American culture in overt and subtle ways in their films about Ireland. In this essay, I examine the Africanist identity figured in repeated references to African-American jazz music in Neil Jordan's 1976 short story 'Night in Tunisia', in his first feature film, *Angel* (1982), and in *The Miracle* (1990).

It should not be surprising that a commercial and/or critical Irish cinema would engage with images and issues from US film and culture, since Hollywood is responsible for most twentieth-century cinematic images of Ireland. What I will argue more specifically, however, is that Jordan addresses experiences and effects of cultural alienation by invoking the (generally absent) figure of the African-American jazz musician. Jazz music, played by Irish musicians, is thematically and structurally central to *Angel* and *The Miracle*, which allows Jordan to allegorize what are often perceived as similar, if not shared, histories of cultural theft, enslavement and subjugation. Jordan calls up experiences associated with colonial oppression, including an anxiety surrounding the question of origins, a rejection of linear history, the neocolonial influence of US mass culture, and the peculiar configuration of genders and sexualities under colonialism.

Jordan's use of jazz music thus appeals to a shared experience of alienation, to the common experience of being rendered a foreigner in one's native land. As Irish historian and cultural theorist Luke Gibbons writes,

[t]here was no need to go abroad to experience the 'multiple identities' of the diaspora valorized in post-colonial theory: the uncanny experience of being a stranger to oneself was already a feature of life back home.⁴

- 4 Luke Gibbons 'Unapproved roads: Ireland and post-colonial identity' in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press 1996) p. 176.

Jordan's fiction and films also point to the history of Irish and Irish-American contact with African-American culture. For example, Krin Gabbard, writing on jazz in American film, speculates upon the disproportionate representation of Irish immigrants as minstrel performers:

[it was] perhaps the one ethnic group in the US whose members could identify with the powerlessness and poverty of blacks during the first decades of the nineteenth century.⁵

Clearly, there are problems associated with making neat analogies

- 5 Krin Gabbard *Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1996) p. 43.

6 Toni Morrison *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1992)

between Irish and African–American experience, but I am less interested in establishing the relevance of the comparison than in examining the textual and political significance of Jordan’s repeated and explicit appropriations of jazz. Jordan’s invocation of jazz partly conforms to the model forwarded by Toni Morrison that of the Africanist identity as structuring absence.⁶ But I will also argue that, thematically, Jordan’s jazz is a means of expressing male sexuality and violence and, as such, may reinscribe notions of the spontaneity, expressiveness and hypersexuality of the black male performer even as it constructs a potentially unsettling hybridized postcolonial masculinity. In the course of paying homage to jazz figures such as Charlie Parker and Louis Armstrong through his young male Irish protagonists, Jordan’s films evoke stereotyped associations, recirculating primitivist assumptions of jazz’s spontaneous voicing of the soul and the utopian fantasy of the jazz soloist’s ability to assert individualism within a group structure. The Irish jazz musician’s performative deployment of masculinity is oral and phallic, expressive and exhibitionistic, and based on problematic images of black performers. However, the sexuality associated with jazz suggests a simultaneously pre- and post-Oedipal masculinity that is distinguishable from the available colonial modes of paternalistic authority or the insufficient, emasculated Irish ‘paddy’.

Moreover, in formal terms, Jordan does ‘signify’ upon the jazz tradition by using the music to direct visual style and narrative form, thus translating jazz into film style. Jordan’s editing adapts to the rhythm, pace and colour of jazz, ultimately undermining narrative coherence and chronological time. These interventions into narrative form – the structural centrality of jazz – underscore thematic anxieties regarding ‘impure’ cultural or biological origins and non-linear history. Film theories dealing with narrative disruption have tended to focus on the visual spectacle of female sexuality. In ‘Night in Tunisia’, *Angel* and *The Miracle*, however, visual and, primarily, auditory ‘specularity’ defer or short-circuit narrative trajectories, reorganizing the film according to repetition and revision around narrative and visual ellipses, which is consistent with the films’ thematic concerns with cultural and personal loss.

Angel of death: ‘Strange Fruit’ and ‘Danny Boy’

Henry Louis Gates argues that jazz music provides one salient example of signifying, which he defines as the double-voiced quality of a text that speaks to other texts. In particular, he writes,

black jazz musicians . . . perform each other’s standards on a joint album, not to critique these but to engage in refiguration as an act of homage . . . this form of the double-voiced implies unity and resemblance rather than critique and difference.⁷

7 Henry Louis Gates Jr. *The Signifying Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press 1988) p. xxvii

Jordan locates himself within the jazz tradition in order to pay respect to African-American jazz musicians and to foreground resemblances between Irish and African-American experiences of political and psychological repression. In an interview published in the *Irish Times*, in which he discusses his choice of the Billie Holiday/Lewis Allan song 'Strange Fruit' as the musical centrepiece for *Angel*, Jordan suggests

You could almost transpose the whole lyrics over to Ireland . . . there you're speaking about a situation where human beings killed people they didn't know for reasons which had nothing to do with any kind of human emotion whatever. It was just to do with racial differences; and it's a similar kind of situation that I was talking about in the film.⁸

8 Cited in Richard Kearney
Avenging angel: an analysis of
Neil Jordan's first Irish feature
film *Studies in Irish Quarterly*
Review no 71 (1982) p 302

The Africanist presence in this instance is utilized as the absent but masterful original composer and performer; the Irish musicians and filmmaker signify upon that tradition, improvising upon the song's associations. In Jordan's work, the disembodied African-American 'speaks' through his or her music, which would appear to complicate Toni Morrison's paradigm wherein the Africanist presence must be silenced and erased. In the American literary tradition, Morrison argues:

to notice [race] is to recognize an already discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body.⁹

9 Morrison *Playing in the Dark*
pp 9-10

Invisibility and disembodiment in *Angel*, 'Night in Tunisia' and *The Miracle* is enforced – there are no African-American characters – but silence, ostensibly, is not, for the jazz music is central to the protagonists' identities.

The apparent inclusion of African-American voice through music is, if not undermined entirely, at least tempered by the fact that the music – as it is rendered by Jordan's young male saxophone-playing protagonists – is the means by which adolescent, repressed masculine sexuality and its relation to violence is explored. In the process, primitivist associations 'idealizing a black other as spontaneous, transgressive, and ecstatically free of bourgeois restraint' are played out.¹⁰ Thus the African-American 'voice' turns out to be audible but non-verbal, expressive yet indeterminate; marshalled in the service of sexuality. The displacement and appropriation permit Jordan's characters, as well as readers and viewers, to enjoy the auditory pleasures of minstrel performance, to 'consume fantasies of black male sexuality mediated through white performers'.¹¹

10 Gabbard *Jammin' at the*
Margins p 2

11 *Ibid* p 45

Jordan's choice of jazz music is not without historical resonances of fantasy and rebellion for his local as well as for international audiences. Consider, for example, the war waged on dance halls and jazz music, two of Jordan's omnipresent tropes, by Father Peter

12 Quoted in Gibbons,
Transformations in Irish Culture,
p. 101.

Conefrey of Leitrim during the 1920s and 1930s, which culminated in a demonstration against jazz music in 1934. Father Conefrey associated socialist rebellion and sexual permissiveness with jazz, writing:

Jazz is an African word meaning the activity in public of something of which St Paul said 'Let it not be so much as named among you'. The dance and music with its abominable rhythm was borrowed from Central Africa by a gang of wealthy Bolsheviks in the USA to strike at Church civilization throughout the world.¹²

It is thus against a backdrop of Catholic Church opposition to jazz, and a history of African-American social protest and resistance encoded within jazz styles and lyrics, that Jordan configures his male coming-of-age narratives.

In *Angel*, 'Strange Fruit' and 'Danny Boy' are the songs – African-American and Irish, respectively – around which a narrative of violent death and equally violent revenge is played out. A young saxophonist named Danny (Stephen Rea) is befriended by a mute girl (Annie) prior to a performance at a rural dance hall near Derry called the Dreamland Ballroom. She waits outside for him after the performance, putting her hands over his eyes, revealing herself to him and making love with him in a concrete construction pipe near the entrance to the ballroom. Danny and Annie witness the apparently sectarian killing of his manager, then Danny watches as the masked assassins shoot and kill Annie and the dance hall



Danny (Stephen Rea) and
Deidre (Honor Heffernan) in the
Dreamland Ballroom. *Angel*
(1982). Picture courtesy:
BFI Stills.

explodes in flames. The rest of the film is concerned with Danny's quest for revenge; he tracks down her killers one by one, becoming more like them, and also more anonymous, as he kills them. In the end, it becomes apparent to Danny that the police have allowed him to carry out this murderous spree of revenge because through it he leads them to the perpetrators, one of whom is a police officer himself.

Richard Kearney's excellent analysis of the film focuses on Danny's gradual substitution of violence for art, signified in a scene where he takes his saxophone from its case and puts a machine gun in its place.¹³ Kearney argues that the film's strength lies in the way it addresses the psychological motivations for violence in a timeless, almost mythical manner:

One of the strengths of *Angel* is its precise ability to focus on this 'basic mechanical level' of reflex attraction and recoil, symptomatic of the workings of the subconscious. In this way Jordan investigates that fundamental nexus between aesthetic creativity and violence which has become one of the most frequent stamping grounds of contemporary art.¹⁴

Furthermore, Kearney emphasizes the manner in which the psychic undercurrents of the film shape its narrative form, specifically noting that 'while the deep-structure unfolds "synchronically" by repeating key visual and sound motifs, the surface structure progresses "diachronically" according to the standard conventions of a sequential plot'.¹⁵ Kearney identifies several critical motifs which operate at a 'vertical (counter-narrative)' level, including dancing, music, the laying-on of hands and framing images, noting the recurrence of Verdi's Requiem, 'Danny Boy' and 'Strange Fruit'. Kearney, however, does not address in detail the effects of the diegetic performances and the non-diegetic jazz music on the film's narrative, except to note the political implications of the lyrics of 'Strange Fruit'. Extending Kearney's analysis, I would argue that the music in *Angel* – dominated by a jazz aesthetic based on repetition and revision – underscores the themes of sexuality, loss and violence, and undergirds the film's formal and narrative circularity.

The film's opening credits are accompanied by a diegetic saxophone riff played by Danny outside the Dreamland Ballroom. Annie touches the instrument and he tells her 'it's a saxophone'. The object, endowed with phallic status, is associated with Danny, 'the Stan Getz of South Armagh', as we see him fondle, fiddle with and clean the instrument repeatedly.¹⁶ By the time Danny finds the gun hidden in his first victim's apartment, his assembling of the automatic weapon looks familiar because it visually and aurally parallels his frequent manipulation of the saxophone. Given the phallic associations of jazz instruments documented by Krin Gabbard

13 See Kearney 'Avenging angel'

14 Richard Kearney 'Nationalism and Irish cinema' in *Transitions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1988), p. 177

15 Ibid. p. 179

16 The reference to Getz, a white jazz musician, makes Jordan's associations with African-American jazz non-exclusive. However, Getz can be distinguished from bop guru Charlie Parker, the focus of *Night in Tunisia*, by the fact that he was an extremely popular rather than esoteric performer. Thus Jordan may be highlighting the popular, watered-down version of bop that Danny's pop/jazz band plays.

and suggested in these scenes, it is not surprising that after the bombing of the ballroom a guilty and angry Danny has actually lost his alto saxophone and is afraid that he has lost the ability to play. When he tells his Aunt May he has lost his saxophone, her reply – ‘We’ve all lost something’ – emphasizes the metaphorical significance of the instrument.

One scene in particular underscores Jordan’s use of jazz music as it insinuates itself into the idiom of his film language. After leaving the hospital, Danny stays at Aunt May’s house, discovering his uncle’s soprano saxophone, which has been stored under a bed. As he plays a mournful cascade of notes and looks out of the window, he visually revisits the scene of the killings in an increasingly rapid and repetitive editing sequence. Shots alternate between images of plenitude (the girl covering his eyes as she walks up behind him outside the dance hall) and violence (the murder of his manager; the burning dance hall). The riff begins with the following shot sequence: Annie’s hands, Annie being shot, and a tiny bell tinkling. As the music speeds up, growing more insistent and shrill, the saxophone repeats a phrase in sync with the images. The sequence peaks with the shot of Annie’s hands repeated three times, and closes with the shot of the bell, suggesting that Danny’s musical play of absence and presence organizes and revises his memory and loss.

Danny’s encounter with Annie and her death become intertwined in memory, whereas previously his musicianship had been associated with sexual conquest alone. During the performance at the Dreamland Ballroom, Danny is the object of various female characters’ visual interest, including that of Annie, a recent bride, and the band’s singer, Deirdre. Prior to the first gig, Danny propositions Deirdre, engages in flirty banter with the bride and finally makes love with Annie. After leaving the hospital and rejoining the band, Danny begins a love affair with Deirdre which is threatened by his increasing alienation. He tells her his problem is ‘like a nothing you can feel, and it gets worse’.

Musicians and murderers are depersonalized in the film, and Danny’s growing anonymity conflates violence and sexuality. When Deirdre tells Danny they’ll be playing his tune, ‘Danny Boy’, he replies, ‘That’s not my tune, that’s everyone’s’. During their flirtation at the Dreamland Ballroom, the bride asks Danny if she has seen him play before, to which he replies ‘we all look the same’. Later, Danny becomes sexually involved with her in order to locate her estranged husband, whom Danny believes was with the men who killed Annie. She waits outside the dance hall in a repeat of Danny’s encounter with Annie. As they compare Danny to the husband, they collapse sexuality (the reason he gives for his questions) and violence (the actual reason he asks them):

Woman: I think you're jealous!

Danny: I want to know everything he ever did with you. Am I like him?

They kiss

Woman. You're like him now.

When Danny finds her husband the next day, he pulls a gun on him. The interchange between the two men suggests their growing similarity.

Danny: How'd you do it?

Man: It's not that hard when you put your mind to it. You may know yourself.

Danny: How did you shoot her?

Man: It's easy, just pull the trigger.

Danny does pull the trigger, making the man his third victim. Later, Deirdre will tell Danny that he is dead, and that he looks just like the police: 'them, like you, only in uniform'

Danny's loss of identity, the collapse of musician and murderer, is marked by an increase in the use of jazz riffs which signal the return of repressed memories, and by a decline in Danny's musical performances. Jazz riffs signal the repetition of previous events when the police approach Danny and take him to the morgue, when the bride tells of her husband's absence on their wedding night (the night Annie is killed), and just before Danny witnesses the new manager making protection payments (which is what brought the paramilitaries down on the previous manager).

It is fitting, then, that a jazz riff sets the stage for the final confrontation between Danny and Bonner, the police officer involved in the paramilitary violence. The film returns full circle visually and aurally; 'Here we are again', Bonner remarks as he drags Danny into the ruins of the Dreamland Ballroom. He makes the analogy between music and violence complete: 'It's a lot easier to play than the saxophone', he says of his gun, 'You only have the one tune'. The gun creates loss and the saxophone relives and revises the absence which becomes a presence: Danny's 'nothing that gets worse'. Bonner is killed by his superior, Bloom, as Danny is returned to the position of witness to violence rather than perpetrator. Verdi's Requiem, the musical accompaniment to the initial scene of violent killing, is heard over the sounds of Bloom's helicopter in the film's closing moments.

Jordan's use of jazz foregrounds the relationship between sexuality and violence. Not only are the specific songs Danny performs connected to his struggle against violence and anonymity, but the non-diegetic score, resonant with Danny's replaying and revising the loss of Annie and his innocence, is critical to the film's anti-narrative elements and to Jordan's visual style.

'Night in Tunisia': jazz combo as utopian family

'Night in Tunisia', a clear precursor to *The Miracle*, deals with an unnamed adolescent boy negotiating his emerging sexuality and nurturing his artistic talent in the context of various 'improper' family structures during two months at a seaside town. The boy's father, a professional musician, plays,

what he said would be his last stint, since there was no more place for brassmen like him in the world of three-chord showbands. . . . Every night his father took the tenor sax and left for Mosney to play with sixteen others for older couples who remembered what the big bands of the forties sounded like. And he was left alone with his sister who talked less and less as her breasts grew bigger. With the alto saxophone which his father said he could learn when he forgot his fascination for three-chord ditties. With the guitar which he played a lot, as if in spite against the alto saxophone.¹⁷

17 Neil Jordan *A Neil Jordan Reader: Night in Tunisia and Other Stories* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), p. 34

The following themes – almost all of them circulating around the musical instruments in the story – are translated from the story into the film: the absent mother; the father's profession as a swing-band hack and his desire for his son to play the saxophone; the generational rift between big-band swing and bop, signified by the alto saxophone, symbol of bop; the saxophone versus the guilty pleasure of the guitar; the incestuous displacements of eroticism between the instruments and his sister, which also extend to an older unnamed girl with whom he and his sister have spent a night under a blanket on the golf course during a previous summer stay.

Several passages from 'Night in Tunisia' highlight the sexual associations Jordan attaches to the Dizzy Gillespie composition which lends the story its title. When the boy first hears Charlie Parker's famous version of the song:

He heard the radio crackle over the sound of falling water and heard a rapid-fire succession of notes that seemed to spring from the falling water, that amazed him, so much faster than his father ever played, but slow behind it all, melancholy, like a river. He came out of the toilet and stood listening with his father. Who is that, he asked his father. Then he heard the continuity announcer say the name Charlie Parker and saw his father staring at some point between the wooden table and the wooden holiday home floor.¹⁸

18 *Ibid.* pp. 42–3

Lest the connections between the oral physicality of playing the saxophone and sexuality be missed, the boy has already encountered a youth, a tall thin boy who 'put his mouth to the mouth of the French letter and blew. It expanded, huge and bulbous, with a tiny bubble at the tip.'¹⁹

19 *Ibid.* p. 38

The saxophone and the condom suggest both orality and homoeroticism; however, the boy's preference for the saxophone and implicit rejection of overt homosexuality is revealed in a scene where the thin boy puts on a condom and masturbates. In contrast to the sensual images of fluidity in Parker's playing, the boy notes the dead-end quality of autoeroticism and, implicitly, homoeroticism. 'He saw how the liquid was caught by the antiseptic web, how the sand clung to it when the thin boy threw it, like it does to spittle'.²⁰

20 Ibid p 43

Furthermore, the Parker solo freezes space and time by occupying both simultaneously and, unlike the thin boy's 'antiseptic web', the music is orgasmically transcendent:

The notes soared and fell, dispelling the world around him, tracing a series of arcs that seemed to point out a place, or if not a place, a state of mind. . . . He decided it was a place you were always in, yet always trying to reach, you walked towards all the time and yet never got there, as it was always beside you.²¹

21 Ibid p 46

The boy repeatedly encounters the older girl, to whom a less ambient, more phallic eroticism seems to cling, along with her yellow cardigan. The girl is represented in distinctly Nabokovian terms, suggesting her sexual knowledge and her own incestuous family structure. She plays tennis with an older man, without much interest on her part. When the game is completed, he hurries her to a nearby car.

She was standing on the one spot, dead-centre of the court, hardly looking at all at her opponent. She was hitting every ball cleanly and lazily and the sound that came from her racquet each time was that taut twang that he knew only came from a good shot. . . . And every now and then when the man she was playing against managed to send a shot towards the sidelines, she didn't bother to follow it at all. She let the white ball bounce impotent towards the wire mesh.

He watched the small fat man he didn't recognize lose three balls for every ball won. He relished the spectacle of a fat man in whites being beaten by a bored teenage girl in sagging high heels.²²

22 Ibid p 39

The girl, unlike Lolita, is also apparently suicidal: the boy 'learnt that underneath her frayed blouse her wrists were marked'.²³

23 Ibid p 33

After dissatisfying encounters with the thin boy and others like him as they play on the beach, singling out women to call 'whores', the main character returns home to the piano, 'trying to imitate that sound like a river he has just heard'.²⁴ He plays a recording of Charlie Parker's 'Night in Tunisia' and finally picks up the alto saxophone, allowing his father to help him find the notes.

24 Ibid p 46

He learned the first four keys that day and when his father took his own instrument and went out to his work in Butlins he worked out several more for himself. When his father came back at two in the morning, he was still playing . . . He forgot the raft and the games of pontoon and the thin boy's jargon. He stayed inside for days and laboriously transferred every combination of notes he had known on the piano onto the metal keys. He lost his tan and the gold sheen of the instrument became quickly tarnished with sweat, the sweat that came off fingers in the hot metal room. He fashioned his mouth round the reed till the sounds he made became like a power of speech, a speech that his mouth was the vehicle for but that sprang from the knot of his stomach, the crook of his legs.²⁵

25 *Ibid* p. 47

The boy masters his own new language of the body, his own jargon, with his father's help. He learns that the girl with marked wrists had been rescued by the lifeguard several times from 'a part of the beach too near the shore to drown in by accident', and he approaches her. He plans to tell her about 'that place' he has found in the music. In the final passage of the story, sex and saxophone, woman and water merge in a triangulated image of mutual oral engulfment and sexual aggression:

She raised her head and opened her mouth, her answer already there. She inhabited that place, was already there, her open mouth like it was for the lifeguard when he pressed his hand to her stomach, pushed the salt water out, then put his lips to her lips and blew.²⁶

26 *Ibid* p. 49

27 Gabbard *Jammin at the Margins* p. 97

28 Elsewhere I have argued that Jordan's use of triangulation in *The Crying Game* offers possibilities not only for the inclusion of bisexual characters such as Jody but also for bisexual spectatorship practices in which desire and identification are not wholly distinct processes. See 'Straddling the screen: bisexual spectatorship and contemporary narrative film' in *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

29 Consider, for example, Parker's 'Famous Alto Break' from a 1946 Dial recording of *Night in Tunisia*. According to Mark Gardner, Parker 'felt he would be unable to reproduce the soaring spontaneity in subsequent efforts' and thus released the fragment as 'Famous Alto Break'. Whether this is the solo identified by Jordan in the story is unclear – a number of versions of Parker playing *Night in Tunisia* exist. See Barry Kernfeld (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Recorded Jazz* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1995) p. 221.

In these passages, wordlessly, water and sound, orality and sensuality are expressed in the fluid Parker style the boy imitates. The orality of his sexuality and his rejection of the other boys' games signify his adoption of the 'appealingly unconventional paradigms of masculinity' that jazz presents.²⁷ He becomes assertive, yet does not challenge his father in order to achieve mastery. His masculinity cannot be associated with the controlling mastery of a colonial paternal figure or the emasculated colonized subject represented by his father. And, interestingly, this polymorphous sexuality seems to require a triangulation, a third term – the lifeguard's lips breathing life into the cardigan-clad girl's mouth.²⁸

Charlie Parker's playing speed, and his improvisations from the top of the anchoring chord rather than the middle, are only two of the reasons he is recognized as the most important jazz soloist since Louis Armstrong. Parker, along with Dizzy Gillespie, is credited with the innovations of 1940s and 1950s bop, a combo-centred style which depended upon instrumental virtuosity and improvisation, both displayed in landmark and fetishized solos.²⁹ The combo functioned, in utopian terms, as a community in which individuality and artistry

were prized – the polar opposite of the band the boy's father plays with for a living

In allegorizing the father–son relationship through jazz, Jordan points to a fantasy of unconflicted Oedipality, and a community in which individuality is nurtured. The unmentioned missing mother is refigured as musical instrument; the father assists his son in his quest for physical and aesthetic transcendence rather than competing with him, and prepares the boy for consummation with Jordan's version of the sweater girl. Curiously, the sister drops out of the story, displaced by the ephemeral music and the embodied and sexualized older girl.

The allegory of spiritually meaningful community and transcendent sexuality made possible by African–American jazz artistry is not simply an interesting feature of Jordan's analogy between African–American and Irish culture. As Luke Gibbons points out,

It is not simply . . . that allegory comes after the event, a mask that can be removed at will; it is part of consciousness itself under certain conditions of colonial rule.³⁰

Perhaps, then, displacing generational, political and sexual conflicts onto jazz in the story and the film is part of the consciousness of these works. One reviewer noted in *Irish Stage and Screen* that the 'only bond between the father and his son [in 'Night in Tunisia'] is their common love for Charlie Parker music and playing the saxophone'.³¹ Perhaps, then, their common desire for an expressive, oral, performative alternative to conventional masculinity, their problematic negotiation of individuality and community, and their location of those desires and their realization in jazz, are all part of the formal structure of that bond and of the story.

The Miracle: jazz as Oedipal spectacle

If the artistry of Charlie Parker, bop soloist *par excellence*, is the centre of the short story, the Hoagy Carmichael classic 'Stardust', made famous by swing soloist *par excellence* Louis Armstrong, is the set piece which mediates relations among the characters in *The Miracle*. Krin Gabbard remarks that 'members of Armstrong's band are said to have referred to their accompanying figures on Armstrong's 1931 recording of "Stardust". as "the fucking rhythm"',³² and in this film version of the Freudian family romance, this rhythm, and the repetition and revision that characterize jazz form, revolve around the maternal body, which is no longer displaced and reshaped as a musical instrument as it was in the short story. In this tale of the return of the repressed maternal body, and the son's assertion of his sexuality and musicianship, the boy can achieve transcendence only through through the most literally

30 Luke Gibbons 'Identity without a centre' in *Transformations in Irish Culture* pp. 142–3

31 Sylvia Thomson 'Miracle man' *Irish Stage and Screen* vol. 3 (1990/91) p. 7

32 Gabbard 'Jammin' at the Margins' p. 143

transgressive sexual act: maternal incest. The form that the film's narrative assumes is an explicitly Oedipal scenario structured by jazz music.

In *The Miracle*, Jimmy's absent mother, whom he believes to be dead because this is the story told to him by his father Sam, returns to the seaside town of Bray. Her reappearance disrupts the intact and continuous life story Sam has crafted and complicates Jimmy's adolescent sexuality. Furthermore, her return rewrites Jimmy's biological and cultural origins because the surprising source of Jimmy's parentage is a problematic interpenetration of American and Irish popular cultures. Renee Baker, the absent/present mother, is an American stage actress and singer, whereas the overly present, overly embodied father is an Irish musician who drinks too much.

Jimmy performs with his father in a dance hall for middle-aged couples, but resists being absorbed into the combo's repertoire, aware and resentful that it does not much matter what he plays because nobody is listening. He walks the boardwalk by day with his chum, a sisterly girl named Rose, whose histrionic claim that she and Jimmy are 'too friendly to be lovers, too close to be friends' belies her obvious feelings for him. Her phrase is an apt representation of the romance narratives she and Jimmy concoct on the boardwalk, as they use the other beachcombers as fodder for indulging in flights of verbal acrobatics. In this manner, the film is framed by an attention to the way narratives are constructed.

Renee appears on the boardwalk one day, arriving by train from Dublin. Rose initiates the young couple's interest, wondering if she got off at the wrong stop, but it is finally Jimmy who is entranced by Renee. The triangulation of this relationship is visually suggested in the scene of Renee's arrival, when Jimmy and Rose follow her to the stairs leading to the beach and Renee is framed between them. Jimmy pesters Renee when she visits the beach, rides the same train into Dublin and follows her to the Olympia Theatre where she is performing a stage version of 'Destry Rides Again', the 1939 US musical-Western featuring Jimmy Stewart and Marlene Dietrich.³³ Jimmy steals a poster bearing her image and puts it up in his room. In repeated visits by train, Jimmy watches Renee playing the phallic Frenchy to her counterpart's non-violent Destry; she shoots, sings, smokes and ultimately dies taking a bullet intended for Destry. The nightly repetitions of her death and her blood-stained costume evoke her real and symbolic deaths in the film just as Jimmy's endless loops on the train signal his problematic relationship to origin and destination.

Jimmy's parents collude in keeping the secret from him, but Renee and Jimmy's obsessive interest in one another leads Jimmy first to jealousy, then to the discovery of his prehistory, once again in a manner mediated by an image. His access to the primal scene is

33 This reversal echoes that of *The Playboys* in which the film version of *Gone With the Wind* is reenacted on stage.

34 Jordan's novel *The Past* deals with a man trying to reconstruct his ancestry from a series of photographs taken in 1914. Arguably, the photograph of Jody and Dil that Jody shows to Fergus while in captivity in *The Crying Game* establishes Fergus's positions of desire and/or identification in relation to Jody and Dil.

35 Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins* p. 6.

distinctly photographic; in typical Jordan fashion he finds a photograph of Renee and Sam in Renee's purse.³⁴

If the psychodynamics of the men's relationship subtends the triangulated structures of the short story, the film's ventriloquism of sexuality and loss through jazz music results in a refusal of narrative progression other than by riffing, improvisation and repetition. This circularity is certainly consonant with the film's self-conscious focus on the way stories and histories are constructed. Gabbard warns, in relation to American cinema, that

As both psychoanalytic and structuralist film theorists have pointed out, musical numbers bring the film's story to an abrupt halt. Since narrative is indisputably what most audiences crave, then a film about jazz or a film with jazz cannot dwell on the music for too long.³⁵

Jordan defies this convention in *The Miracle*, dwelling obsessively on jazz in full-length performances and in scenes during which the non-diegetic jazz score is privileged. Here, as in the short story, jazz music is no liberatory or creative outlet unless it recognizes the solo artistry of the performer, and/or the sexual expressiveness of the music. Jimmy disdainfully rejects a job playing with his father's dance-hall ensemble for one accompanying a circus contortionist, clearly enjoying the challenge of matching his playing to her body's movements in rehearsal. Continuing the sexualization of Jimmy's musicianship, Jimmy can be seen through the contortionist's legs – framed in this way by the camera – during the public performance. As Rose's jealousy ignites, she leaves Jimmy to his own devices – travelling in seemingly endless loops of train windows accompanied by non-diegetic jazz music between the seaside town and Dublin. At a post-performance party Jimmy accompanies Renee as she sings 'Stardust', a song about invoking memories. Significantly, the camera circles Jimmy and Renee as he plays piano for his mother, just as it does in the scene where he plays for the contortionist.

The scenes in which Jimmy spontaneously plays the saxophone for the acrobat and the piano for his mother have all the hallmarks of a Mulveyan spectacular image – they do not 'further the narrative', but instead foreground the recirculation of music and rhythm as part of Jimmy's psychosexual investigation. After playing with the circus and for Renee, Jimmy dreams of spinning the rope for his mother as she crazily circles the tent above him while his father, and photographs of his father, burn nearby. These repetitive actions, underscored by jazz, shape the film as lack and its revision. Jimmy is engaged in an extremely complex *fort-da* game. He has experienced the lack of a mother his entire life, yet when he discovers near the film's conclusion that Renee is his mother, he learns a new register of loss – the loss of a mother who is not dead.

He must, in a sense, improvise the Oedipal conflict through that configuration.

Henry Louis Gates writes that 'Improvisation, of course, so fundamental to the very idea of jazz, is "nothing more" than repetition and revision'.³⁶ And Luke Gibbons, writing on the Irish film *Maeve* (Pat Murphy, 1981), associates narrative redirection through repetition as a device which foregrounds the past as a destabilizing force:

In *Maeve*, landscape becomes one of the primary means of arresting the flow of events, becoming in effect a form of congealed memory. The apparent continuity between past and present is brought out in the film by a series of flashbacks inserted into the narrative without the usual demarcating devices of blurred focus or dissolves – as if to say, in *Maeve*'s own words, that 'the more you focus on the past, the more reality it gains' ³⁷

Gibbons further writes that,

the impossibility of gaining direct access to the past is not because it is sealed off, as in a time capsule, but because it is part of an unresolved historical process which engulfs the present ³⁸

This view of repetition as a means of acknowledging the past as a process taking place in the present is extremely helpful for my reading of *The Miracle*. Jimmy deals with the return of the repressed lost maternal object in the present through his music, reliving, reinvoking, and rehearsing her absence and its relation to his desire. The saxophone and jazz music are his ventriloquists, as they are for the boy in 'Night in Tunisia'. The privileging of the performance, and the insistence upon Jimmy's desire to perform for his object of desire, his mother, again suggests a refashioned masculinity at once oral, phallic and fetishized

As if the film's sense of time as repetition and revision extends to its mise-en-scene, several commentators have remarked that the look of the film is nostalgic, evoking a sense of the 1950s

Renee is a glimpse of the exotic, a luminously sensual woman of a kind seldom seen since the Fifties, and as such Jimmy invests all his dreams and desires in her.³⁹

Like the boy discovering the solos of Charlie Parker for the first time, Jimmy's journey becomes detached from real time, and the various performance times in the film – Renee's, Sam's, Jimmy's, the circus – assume a heightened prominence as a result. And Jimmy's last performance is an extremely shocking grand finale. Jimmy and Renee have sex on the boardwalk after the secret has been revealed.

36 Gates *The Signifying Monkey*, p. 64

37 Luke Gibbons 'Lies that tell the truth' in *Transformations in Irish Culture*, pp. 119–20

38 Luke Gibbons, 'Race against time: racial discourse and Irish history' in *Transformations in Irish Culture*, p. 157

39 Eamonn O'Donnell 'The Miracle' *Film Base News* (July–Aug 1991) p. 22. And see Denis Staunton 'Neil Jordan's new film a hit in Berlin' *Irish Times* 22 February 1991 p. 10. ('Scenes in the circus and on the theatre stage lend the film an old-fashioned look placing it in Neil Jordan's words "outside time"')

Maternal/paternal allegory

In 'Night in Tunisia' and *The Miracle* narrative is short-circuited by obsessive, repetitive iterations of performance and theatricality, specifically in the idiom of African-American jazz music. In the film, as in improvisation, jazz music admits of a troubled relationship to the past and produces a juxtaposition and proliferation of complementary and contradictory images without origin or destination. It is interesting that a number of reviewers called *The Miracle* Jordan's 'home movie', as if its small budget and Irish shooting location secured his return to his proper origin, because this is a film in which origins are mythologized and problematic, fetishized and violated in an almost schizophrenic manner.

The formal narrative circularity, wherein the jazz performances, non-diegetic jazz and Jimmy's circular, neverending train rides structure the film in negative terms, suggests an anxiety of origins expressed through a musical language of loss. The structure foregrounds the problem of obtaining access to any origin (biological, ethnic, cultural) in a postcolonial and postmodern context that increasingly recognizes the complexity of cultural hybridity. The absent mother, Renee, performs in a staged musical Western in the role made famous by Marlene Dietrich, significantly, Jimmy initially guesses that the mysterious, foreign woman is French while Rose believes she is English.

The relationship between Sam and Jimmy is crucial and yet fraught; their shared love of jazz is both a means of connection and the site of their recognition of loss, in a different 'register of memory.'⁴⁰ In both works, stage, film, musical and circus performers invoke and critique neocolonial power relations, themselves often cloaked in parental metaphors, as they unfold in the culture of entertainment. The films do not directly address the issue of British imperialism or US neocolonialism – rather, familial and communal structures are always already embedded within those politics. Thus any individual or cultural origin – figured as paternal or maternal or as theatrical source material – is always elsewhere and always impure, refusing the postcolonial subject any linear cultural or ethnic genealogy. Thus Jordan's use of jazz music at once renders the peculiar connection his works assert between Irish and African-American cultures, and evokes their shared histories of loss and dislocation even as he points to the neocolonial influence of American music and popular culture as it operates in contemporary Ireland.

Why Jordan is so interested in reworking colonial and neocolonial relations in Oedipal scenarios is an interesting question. I would argue that Jordan's reworking of Freudian/Oedipal tropes in *The Miracle* is grounded in certain historical events of 1980s Ireland – events that make reference to a number of converging and imploding

⁴⁰ Gibbons 'Ireland and post-colonial identity' p. 172

41 I am indebted to Luke Gibbons for this insight and for the information he presented during a lecture at Northern Illinois University's Media and Culture in Ireland seminar at Dublin City University July 1996

42 Celtic dreamer p 20

43 Miracle worker Irish Independent 4 March 1991

'traditions', such as the mythologized Irish family, the repression of female sexuality and the problematic category of Irish masculinity.⁴¹ Jordan himself states that he

had an idea of using incest as an expression of rupture within a family, a prism where different aspects of what that implies are explored. mother-love, jealousy, sexual attraction⁴²

and he suggests that the film

deals with a specifically Irish kind of failure to understand women on the part of men. It grapples with the inarticulacy that the male character needs in order to keep going.⁴³

The oral and phallic sexuality of the boy in 'Night in Tunisia' is turned towards his mother with a vengeance in *The Miracle* – suggesting the desire to both possess and destroy the maternal body. I would suggest that Jordan could no longer dispense with the mother's body in the film as he did in the story, because tensions surrounding marriage, abortion and female sexuality reached crisis proportions during the 1980s. The maternal body became a contested entity in the 1983 abortion referendum, which made abortion illegal and unconstitutional, and during the 1984 events at Granard, where a fifteen-year-old pregnant girl who had told no one of her pregnancy died near a statue of the Virgin Mary. Her sister committed suicide a few months later. In that same year, the Kerry babies incident occurred, in which a woman was accused of murdering a newborn baby found washed up on a beach in a blue fertilizer bag. A woman, Joanne Hayes, from whom a confession was extracted without a lawyer present, was later shown by DNA testing not to be the dead infant's mother. And in 1986, the divorce referendum concluded a series of events which had placed women's bodies, sexuality and lives at the centre of national debates about Ireland's modernization. For these reasons, I suspect, Jordan could no longer displace incestuous desire onto the saxophone, the maternal body had become a player or, perhaps, a pawn, in the allegorical struggle for national and sexual identity.

The Diana debate

Ritual

First, there is the fact that most of us will always be able to recall the moment we heard about the crash. I had just entered the local subway station, together with my husband and a close friend who was visiting us from the States. We were on our way into downtown Stockholm to enjoy an evening of good food and maybe some dancing, when we saw the headlines that Princess Diana was seriously injured in a car accident in Paris. The memory is vivid, of the three of us standing together, fumbling for our subway tickets as we stared at the row of newsbills and wondered what it meant. Our private memories of that moment and our evening together will be forever fused with others' equally sharp memories of what they were doing when they heard the news, and the histories that unfolded in the days that followed

That piercing moment in the collectivization of memory is an example of the way media work in the ritualization of major public events. Diana's death and the events leading up to the funeral were not events that people watched and 'consumed' so much as participated in, via the media as well as through other private and public forms of documentation and commemoration. Despite the scale of these events, and the millions of people around the world who were wrapped up in them, the phenomenon is not unique. Elsewhere I have explored the ways that media participate in the construction of contemporary ritual ('Media and the ritual process', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol 17, no. 4 [1995], pp. 629–46), and here I wish to use that framework to try

to understand the interrelationships of the media and public responses to events surrounding Diana's death. I argue that the media work not as appropriators of some presumably genuine public emotion and participation, but as collaborators, co-constructors, inseparable from a public 'response' in the interweaving of phenomena and the meanings that accrue to them in the formation and enactment of the rituals of contemporary life

It is important to distinguish between the concept of ritual as I use it here and the many ways ritual has been used in media research both in analysing media texts and to explain various patterns of media production and reception. First, I use ritual to refer to public events involving large numbers of participants. Ritualized events are characterized by being out of the ordinary, bounded and set apart from everyday routines. At the same time, they are structured, containing elements that participants recognize as repetitive and redundant, constructed through complex accretions of characteristics and meanings from previous events and from other domains. Thus even events that are considered unique or without precedent, such as the violent death of a much-loved princess, work as magnets, drawing to them expressive forms familiar from other contexts.

The forms of mourning for Diana, for example, included the familiar patterns of pilgrimages to lay flowers and personal greetings at various sites associated with her life and death. Rituals are clear instances of cultural performance in Singer's sense, recognizable to participants and observers as expressing societal values through symbolic forms (Martin Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: an Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization* [New York: Praeger, 1972], pp 67–80). Contemporary urban rituals range from officially-sponsored occasions – 'events that present', in Don Handelman's terms – to spontaneous expressions which invert or deconstruct the

dominant social hierarchy – ‘events that re-present’ (Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]). The responses to Diana’s death, not unlike other contemporary rituals, contained elements of both.

Media participate in constituting public events as rituals, first by marking them as of a different order, set apart from everyday life, and second by contributing to the ritual’s internal structure through the patterns used in selecting, recording and presenting chosen aspects of the events. Note that I am not referring here in the first instance to what is seen or read in the media – that is, to media content – but to the patterns of media activity that become visible to participants during the process of forming the event. The presence of media draws participants’ attention to the fact that metanarratives are being constructed, that the event carries symbolic significance beyond the bounded sphere in which it is physically enacted. This dislocation, the movement of an object or event from one domain to another, is central to symbolization and also, as Roberto Da Matta has pointed out, to ritualization (‘Carnival in multiple planes’, in John J. MacAloon [ed.], *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* [Philadelphia: ISHI Press, 1984], pp. 208–40). The media are intrinsic to the cultural performance that constitutes an event as ritual.

The media’s institutional means of transforming a civic ceremony into a ritual of participation for a mass audience has been explored by David Chaney (‘A symbolic mirror of ourselves: civic ritual in mass society’, *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1 [1983], pp. 119–35), and Daniel Dayan’s and Elihu Katz’s more recent work on the collapsing of an individual, private experience into a public and shared identity is also relevant to understanding the quality of public participation in the events surrounding Diana’s death (*Media Events. the Live*

Broadcasting of History [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992]). Yet this research misses the significance of the individual’s own sense of active participation in the creation of a collectivity. It is the individual who chooses the terms and degree of participation, in what ways he or she will ‘be there’, including which media are used – and where self-documentation and non-institutionalized media also play a critical role in how the event is formed and remembered. Considering these aspects of the public’s part in the event is critical to understanding the event as cultural performance.

What do we see when we look back on those events of a year ago? How did the media figure in the ritual of collective grief played out following Diana’s death? In what ways do we see the media participating in the transformation of the private experience to a collective one? The general public could not witness the funeral from inside Westminster Abbey, but those who were in London could gather in front of huge television monitors mounted in Hyde Park. Broadcasting into public spaces was one way the potentially private moment of reception was transformed into a collective experience. Watching events on television at home, one saw the crowds gathered along the route, including the conventional closeups or ‘reaction shots’ of individual faces as part of the live event. This supported an identification with those experiencing the event live, and a sense of participation in a larger (and for those of us outside of Britain) even global collectivity. The media were also physically evident in these scenes, as newspeople perched on walls with their cameras, and moved through the crowds with microphones, waiting along the route of the cortege together with thousands of others. Roger Silverstone describes hearing the tolling of the Westminster Abbey bell, first on television, then blending with the real sound as he walked out of his front door to join the crowds outside the Abbey (‘Flowers and tears: the death of Diana, Princess of

Wales – space’, *Screen*, vol. 39, no. 1 [1998], pp. 81–2) The impossibility of holding a clear distinction between what we experienced ‘live’ and what we experienced through the media is in itself a defining characteristic of these events as significant rituals linking private and collective experience.

Perhaps the clearest example of this occurred in the unfolding of the process of mourning. The media presented many of the conventions of mourning, making references to other events and offering examples of how to observe this ceremony. As in other ritual events, the media played a key role in transforming public space into arenas for performance, and authenticated the significance of specific acts within those spaces. Media helped to establish the places to go to pay homage to the memory of the princess, they documented these pilgrimages and the rising tides of flowers and personal notes accumulating at the sites; they conveyed the importance of including children in the observances, so they too would remember participating in the event. The scenes reminded us on a larger scale of other tragic deaths and how they were observed – lighting candles, bringing flowers and memorabilia, leaving notes – and the coverage undoubtedly added momentum to these observances. In this way the media contributed to the redundancy, the endless repetition, the layers of significance pulled in from other events and domains that is intrinsic to the process of ritualization.

The media showed us that it was appropriate to cry. Due to the conventions of news coverage that include closeups of a variety of participants, we saw the tears and comforting embraces of men and women, of all ages, and from many social groups. These were people selected by the media as typical or representative of those who mourned Diana. By concentrating on the responses and activities of ‘ordinary’ people, the media contributed to the construction of the event as broad and inclusive. Diana’s death then

became the prism that gathered in intense emotions and grieving from other occasions, focused them and allowed their release in a massive collective expression. A man was quoted in *Time* as saying he wept at Diana’s funeral, even though he had not wept at his own father’s. His tears may well be because he hadn’t cried for his father. ‘One grief stood for all’ (Roger Rosenblatt, ‘The year the emotions ruled’, *Time*, 22 December 1997, pp. 55, 50). The collective grief was evident in journalists’ own responses to the events. In a Danish television documentary, *Till Death Do Us Part*, we are shown a closeup of a Danish journalist’s face, her eyes full of tears, as she watches the released balloons float up past the Abbey’s towers. Returning to her newspaper in Copenhagen, the editor explained that her assignment was to describe ‘exactly what it was like to be there’.

The first-person plural, the we-form, peppered the press accounts of Diana’s funeral. The two competing Danish picture papers both carried ‘We miss you’ as their major headline across their front pages. In both *Time* and *Newsweek*, the use of ‘we’ dominated the magazines’ year-end analyses of the outpouring of grief following Diana’s death. ‘That’s why we wept. We felt she was one of us’ (Barbara Kantrowitz, ‘Princess of the world’, *Newsweek*, 22 December 1997, p. 42). To whom does this all-encompassing ‘we’ refer? In the tabloid press, the use of the first person singular signals that an event is so moving or shocking that the reporter’s position as observer outside the event becomes untenable. The I-form signifies that the reporter’s professional demeanour of distance was replaced by the more authentic personal response demanded by the situation. Using ‘we’ takes this one step further, identifying the magazine or newspaper with a collective presumably larger than the group of actual readers, a body bound together by the collective experience of grief over Diana’s death.

Each of these aspects of media coverage underscores the impossibility of constructing and maintaining a media position external to these events. Media presence was expected and accepted, particularly around the funeral, despite the wave of negative reaction to media practices which followed the crash, when many believed that the paparazzi and the press's demands for their photographs were the direct cause of the accident that killed her. The sharp critique of the media's relentless pursuit of Diana in Earl Spencer's eulogy notwithstanding, the media clearly belonged to these events. On the contrary, these critiques illustrate the extent to which media and media practices are integral to many of the events they portray, in particular the lives and deaths of celebrities. There is no position outside the event for the media to stand and merely document, as in the idealized version of the journalists's stance. In this case, media were not only integral to the extraordinary events surrounding Diana's death, but actually constituted the cultural performance of her funeral as a collective ritual response of mourning.

Media scholars, beginning with Carey, have tied a 'ritual view of communication' exclusively to a conservative tradition, where the cultural role of the media is to portray and confirm a particular view of the world, one rooted in consensus and a stable social order (James W. Carey, 'A cultural approach to communication', *Communication*, vol. 2, no. 1 [1975], pp. 1–22). This overlooks the ways that ritual transformations frequently represent reversals of power and threats to the social order, phenomena found in most anthropological analyses of ritual. Anttonen reminds us that van Gennep's original formulation of the concept of ritual included a particular interest in 'places of exchange and transformation in which categorical boundaries are in constant flux' (Pertti J. Anttonen, 'The rites of passage revisited', *Temenos*, no. 28 [1992], pp. 15–52). He was

referring to the liminal conditions which render permeable the boundaries between established spheres of activity and meaning, including their relative positions of power. In the days following Diana's death we saw public displays which loosened boundaries, redefined social categories and challenged established hierarchies of power.

The groundwork for these challenges to the established social order was laid first in the complex history of Diana's persona and her marriage, her position in relation to other members of the Royal Family, and to the people, her subjects who adored her. There is already an extensive literature on the ways in which Diana's life had become an expression of deeply-rooted binary oppositions of British society. Following her death, various pieces of this puzzle were either re-formed or clarified as direct inversions of established hierarchies. The media had defined the significance of the event through their visualization of the variety and number of ordinary people who mourned the princess. This mass then served as the foundation for the reversals of power, enacted in the complex ways people responded to and used the media to express their grief and anger. One saw inversions of the values embedded in the hierarchies of male versus female power, of public versus private spheres, and of the Crown versus the common citizen. Pictures of the crowds standing outside of Buckingham Palace with placards challenging the Queen to 'Show us you care' ultimately brought results.

For all participants who are aware of the media's presence, whether they are documenting the event themselves, are the subjects of media documentation or are observing others being documented, the event becomes, in Handelman's terminology, one that re-presents the lived-in world. The knowledge that documents are being constructed which will 'offer propositions and counter-propositions . . . about the nature of these [social] realities', shifts participants into

a reflexive attitude, which they use in shaping meanings for their experience of the event (Handelman, *Models and Mirrors*, p. 49).

This is the place where media perform their most critical role in the construction of ritual, continually shifting the focus of the event into reflexivity, pushing the performance into metanarrative.

The public response to Diana's death was of course *the* major story of 1997. The media's reviews of the year were dominated by pictures of Diana and her funeral, and the events surrounding her death became the frame to analyse and reflect on what the year had meant. The media sought explanations for the mass response, and the outpouring of emotion surrounding the princess's death. In their answers, they included references to the approaching millenium, to people's frustration with the 1990s as a time of detachment and depersonalization, to a growing desire to become involved or engaged, to feel passion, to show compassion, and to a deep longing for collectivity and a sense of oneness. The press also reflected over its own behaviour, admitting it had lost a sense of perspective and distance as it was caught up in the wave of emotion over the princess's death, when there 'were more important stories' to be covered.

Typically, the media had pushed reflexivity simultaneously in two directions in constructing their (and our) metanarratives of Diana's life and death. One was a thrust into the experience of the event itself, as a wedge between the participating public's lived experience and its witnessing of the ritual performance. The other was out of the event, broadening the base of reflexivity through space and time. The media rewrote the concrete events of September 1997, and inserted them into a set of larger narratives, outside of the realm of everyday life and into the realm of history. The ritual event had become a sign, the basis for an additional transformation into a meta-narrative of questions and answers about who 'we' are,

and what our response to a princess's death means as a symbol of our times

Karin Becker

Hollywood

Hours and hours of television, live coverage, selected famous footage, interviews, reruns of earlier live coverage: the death of Diana was a near unprecedented media spectacle, instigated by the commercial channels who cancelled their planned broadcasts and devoted airtime exclusively to Diana's death and, at the end of that week in August, to her funeral. The public channels half-heartedly followed the commercial channels and lost out in the battle over viewer ratings. No, this is not about Britain, or about a British colony, but about the Netherlands. Although we have a royal family of our own, and although we like to be known for our pragmatism, we grieved over Diana, watched the flowers pile up, tried to get a glimpse of her sons, tut-tutted over Charles's awkwardness, bought Elton John's 'Candle in the Wind'.

Of course, from her engagement onwards Diana became a prominent media figure for us Dutch too. There are not nearly enough royals worldwide to feed the appetite of the gossip press in the first place, but it has to be said Diana was a gem: young, attractive, with the perfect body for wearing expensive clothes. Her greatest appeal, however, was her placelessness. Her life story was written through a great number of popular genres (from soap opera to fairy tale to melodrama), but was never contained by them. The story of her divorce was reported as much by the quality press in the Netherlands as by the popular press, as were the rumours leading up to it. Diana in a sense embodied the changes of our media system: hybridization of genres, the demise of notions of distance, of privacy, of high modernist values in journalism in general, the erosion of clear-cut difference

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between quality and art on the one hand, and cheap entertainment and pulp on the other.

In retrospect, the explanation for her crosscultural appeal would seem to be that she appeared so American. For us Dutch it is often difficult to distinguish between North American and British accents. Before the era of cable television we knew what a British accent was; we heard it in the much-revered quality BBC productions shown on our public television channels. But the moment we were able to receive BBC television directly, much of the mystique of British quality television was lost, and we now learn our English from a mixture of (subtitled) Hollywood, British and Australian television. Britain has suffered greatly from this mid-Atlanticism. It is seen as the birthplace of scandal – with its ultra cheap tabloids and Conservative MPs who apparently engage in the weirdest forms of sexual practice – but also of quaintness, of outdatedness. Diana, after the very first kindergarten pictures of her, never fitted into that pattern. Her media fame in the Netherlands spread with the liberal image she was building: fitness workouts, embracing AIDS as a charitable cause, speaking the language of self-help. None of these bears the slightest relation to a stuffy, English class-ridden society. Diana had the impossible task of bridging the roles of a nineteenth-century princess and a twentieth-century career woman (albeit as a humanitarian ambassador). And we sympathized, in a land where ‘career woman’ spelled ‘Thatcher’, nobody had much hope for her. Yet Diana’s strategic choices held us enthralled: here was a player in a power game who did her damndest.

Diana’s life, then, can only be superficially described in crude feminist terms. After all, our own Queen’s husband has suffered from Diana-like ailments. He has been treated for severe depression and looks only half alive at the formal occasions he attends. We know that Diana was heading for a life circumscribed not by gender codes but by power. It is this political subtext that

fascinates, and which underlined the fourth element of Diana’s transatlantic appeal: her scandalousness. Infidelity in itself is not all that interesting; there is always rumour of untoward sexual behaviour around prominent figures, and women’s bodies often bear the brunt of this more than do men’s. But Diana chose to make a public confession, and discursive boundaries crumbled: soap opera in a serious news programme, made palatable for the serious press. The woman who was to be Queen turned out to be a self-help fan. The Hollywood production staged in the Palaces of Britain gravitated to its core sentimentalism, but with style.

Why would we perceive Diana’s Americanization as such an important political statement? After all, one of the most frequently heard complaints at election time in the Netherlands is that we are veering towards an American situation; in other words, a situation where image is valued greatly, and much more than political content and ability. But the USA stands for much more. It is the land without frontiers, a land where you can make your dreams come true; where a paper-boy can become a millionaire and a kindergarten teacher can be a princess. America may be the domain of bad taste, but it is also the one place on earth where entertainment is unabashedly cherished, where emotions and populism are not a measure of lack of authenticity and quality. It is, in a sense, a place that radiates a democratic ethos which bypasses the closed bastions of governmental politics, regardless of actual relations between its rich and poor, or between its various ethnic groups. It is the country that saved us from totalitarian Nazi rule, and helped us redefine our goals in life by introducing us to the joys of consumer capitalism. We were introduced to popular cultures that lit a fuse beneath the differences between upper and lower class. (See Søren Schou, ‘Postwar Americanisation and European culture’, in Michael Skovmand and Kim Christian Schroeder (eds), *Media Cultures*.

Reappraising Transnational Media [London and New York: Routledge, 1992], pp. 142–58.)

America presents itself as physical, accessible, and so did Diana: the diaphanous gown, the leggings, the low-cut dresses. We hardly ever heard her speak, but then she did not need to. This was a body that spoke for itself. Diana's body announced the end of an era: the end of the apparently natural superiority of the unapproachable upper class, of the private use of women's bodies by their husbands, and of a time in which a woman was bound to play one, and only one, public role. Not Diana as a person, but Diana as body was the bearer of a highly politicized meaning production, American-style: politics and dreamworld mingle and intertwine. Class differences are disintegrated. And when she started to talk, we were immediately able to recognize ourselves in what she said: we all know about unhappiness, betrayal, about postnatal depression, about difficulties with our in-laws, about trying to gain control of our lives. Moreover, Diana offered us her

story through the greatest equalizer: American culture has produced the language of self-help psychology.

Strangely enough for the Brits, Diana became an icon for something 'newer and better', based on politically empty terms like 'humanitarian mission' and 'compassion'. From the vantage point of another country we saw a silent revolution that looked very much like an empty revolution. Diana as undercover agent for a Hollywood democracy, in which the well-off on visits to the poor and needy talk without embarrassment about their own problems (which she apparently did!). Not surprisingly, the one person who really benefited from the circus of her death was Prime Minister Tony Blair (who, in the Dutch idiom, is considered to be sleeker than an eel). He broke all-time popularity records when, with a lump in his throat, he named Diana 'the people's princess'.

Joke Hermes

reports

Commonwealth Fund Conference in American History. Hollywood and its Spectators: the Reception of American Films, 1895–1995, University College London, 12–14 February, 1998

I

Under the glassy eye of Jeremy Bentham, whose clothed skeleton is encased in a hallway at University College London, international scholars met and explored the reception of American films in various countries of the world, and in different cities and towns in the USA. I found this conference stimulating, and I was challenged to reconsider my own work in progress. Other scholars seemed to find similar stimulation which was both tapped and motivated by a presentational format allowing about one-and-a-half hours discussion as part of each panel.

On the eve of the conference, a seminar attended by a small number of conference participants discussed 'Film Studies: Past, Present and Future'. At the time, this topic seemed an odd way to kick off a conference devoted to film reception since it encouraged us, mainly academics, to talk shop about our students, our departments and our institutions. As I reflect now, I see that several of the main themes of the conference were raised in this informal session. People told anecdotes: about students' reactions to old and contemporary film; about their own experiences watching movies; about what they did in theatres in addition to watching movies. During the conference, a number of papers wrestled with questions of who was in the movie theatre and what constituted evidence of their film reception. The problem of how to teach our students to value, to interrogate, and to integrate text with context also surfaced in this discussion. During the conference, participants' work evidenced this

same quandary: how to talk both about movies and about the institutions, times, places and formats in which they are created, viewed and heard. Inevitably and necessarily the relationship among the empirical, the theoretical and the historical arose. Conference papers and panel discussions manifested the tensions about the proper proportions of these historiographical ingredients. The most interesting papers manifested an imaginative interpretation of evidence grounded in theory. Finally talk turned to why we should study film reception. Again, personal and professional motivation sparked the responses: the desire to understand how we watched movies, and how other people at other times and in other places do and did; a fascination with popular culture and its consumers; an interest in how we and other audiences are primed, cued or constructed by the film industry; an urge to study the times and places movies were shown, and to understand their power and influence.

'Remember the Days of Old; Consider the Years of Each Generation.' So read the inscription above the stage in one of the rooms where papers were presented. As the conference's title indicates, the range of concerns spanned one hundred years of movie-going. As a film historian, I tend to create temporal categories in my work, and I organize data into chronological units. This concept was challenged during the conference by papers, like Sonia Livingstone's, Jessica Allen's and Robert Reiner's 'The audience for crime films, 1946–1991: a historical approach to reception studies', and Annette Kuhn's "'That day did last me all my life": *Maytime*, memory, and enduring fandom', which showed how viewers remembered and used their memories of film over time. Janet Staiger's keynote address, 'Writing the history of American film reception', also urged listeners to transcend the sorts of boundaries, including temporal ones, which have circumscribed descriptions of film reception

Staiger focused her talk on the topic of 'Talking in the theatre' before, during and after the movie. Discussion following her presentation raised the issue of anecdote and the problem of evidence. How do we know what was talked about? Who was talking? Why? These questions tapped areas of concern voiced throughout the conference about the influence of class, gender, age, ethnicity, geography and institutional practices like censorship on the experience of being in a theatre and interpreting movies.

About a third of the papers at University College London studied audiences and film reception in the silent period. Certain themes ran through these studies and through the discussion and debate which accompanied their presentation. Several of the papers, including William Uricchio's and Roberta Pearson's, Lee Grieveson's, and Garth Jowett's, addressed contemporary concerns about the 'problem' of children, women and immigrants at the movies. The 'problem' and the 'audience' raised methodological questions: where are the 'traces' of the reception of these groups found?, who, in its contemporary world, was creating the identity of this audience?; for what social or ideological purpose? Implicit in the discourses cited, and explicit in the papers, was the fear, voiced at the time, that movies could influence behaviour and attitudes in such a way as to discourage good citizenship among these impressionable constituencies.

One strategy which seemed more typical of papers dealing with the early period was the grounding of reception in a particular place, as well as a particular time: Chicago 1907; Cooperstown, New York 1907; Southampton 1917, Harlem before 1915, Milwaukee 1918, Jewish immigrants 1907–1914 in New York City; Italian immigrants in New York City in the early 1910s. Here the suggestion was both that place – specific theatres and specific cities – affected reception, and that films'

influence might affect the actions and identities of the groups going to movies in those locations.

A second broad category of papers dealt with Hollywood films from the Golden Age to the 1950s. A number of papers studied films of the 1930s: Richard Maltby argued that the film industry did discursively construct its audience, Gregory Waller focused on the function and functioning of the movie theatre in small towns in Kentucky, and especially on the way live music was used in these theatres during the Depression; Thomas Doherty reconstructed the 'balanced programme' of shorts, cartoons, and newsreels that accompanied feature films at this time. Other papers examined from various angles the importance of US movie stars on audiences in other countries. Erica Carter looked at how German trade-press discourse used Hollywood movie stars (American and European) as a background against which it proposed its essential German values. Annette Kuhn, and others working on an oral history of movie-going in Britain in the 1930s, used interviewees' memories of the 1937 MGM musical *Maytime*, and especially of its stars, Jeannette McDonald and Nelson Eddy, to describe how memory works in the lives of 'enduring fans'. Their 'memory talk' provided another example of the way that film reception continues long past the time of the film's screening. It provided another 'trace' of the history of that initial viewing, but also of the present moment of telling. This was one of several papers in the conference which used oral history as evidence of reception.

Charles Amber's research on movie-going in the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia during the 1940s and 1950s had themes in common with the early cinema papers. Like reformers in the USA in the 1910s, government officials in Central Africa worried about the influence movies might have on black audiences, and censored according to colonial, racist ideology,

producing films with a loose narrative structure more like early film's 'cinema of attractions'.

In his keynote talk, 'Home alone together: Hollywood and the "family film"', Robert Allen argued that the classical Hollywood film, as we have known it is dead, done in by demographics, technology and the financial lure of the 'toyetic' (the potential of elements of a movie to be turned into toys) among others. 'Family film' is a discursive marker of a marketing strategy designed to sell videos, toys and other licensed paraphernalia to parents and children. It also describes films which, for the first time, are not made necessarily to be seen in a theatre, or maybe to be seen at all, if a toy will suffice.

Papers dealing with cinema of the last twenty years raised special problems of film reception: the need to study how people watch videos in their homes, how they manifest a new definition of the 'cinefile' by collecting videos and laserdiscs. Yet strains of traditional themes also run through this work: issues of national identity and censorship and the importance of place in the reception of films, for instance

Reception is a complex phenomenon, and scholars examined it using a variety of questions and a range of methods. Sometimes, in sketching out the institutional context for reception or in describing the film viewed, spectatorship got lost. In discussion there was much talk about the evidence we gathered or wished we had been able to find, and less talk about how and why we gather the data we do. For instance, a number of papers used oral histories, and a discussion of the advantages and drawbacks of this method would have also been useful. Finally, a closing plenary session to complement the opening session on Wednesday evening would have been helpful. Still, as I stated earlier, this was a stimulating conference, answering many questions, raising others, and bringing scholars together in a forum well

designed to examine a crucial facet of film studies.

Leslie Midkiff DeBauche

II

Why should we care about audience reception? Judging by the range of papers delivered at the Hollywood and its Spectators Conference, one persuasive answer must be because as an object of study it allows us to interrogate definitions of historical methodology still too little discussed in the field of film studies. Martin Barker's own reply to this question – that it is the responsibility of researchers to put knowledge in the face of loaded public discourses circulating about films – pointed to methodological tensions within the study of film history and theory which were reflected throughout the conference as a whole. While his comments reflected a general concern to question received wisdom on the issue of film reception and spectatorship, it was a shame that a 'snapshot of the field' event such as this did not highlight more clearly the ways in which such questioning could work productively. An opening or concluding plenary would have been useful, as there were a number of fine papers in isolation. What was missing was a broader sense of how the staging of these different voices could, in an engaged and cooperative fashion, set further terms for debate.

One leading issue addressed by two of the keynote speakers was that of where exactly reception begins and ends? Janet Staiger's Commonwealth Fund Lecture, 'Writing the history of American film reception', was delivered with an entertaining sense of commitment and intellectual pleasure. It underlined again the need to counteract the normative paradigm of a fixed sense of possible readings which may be gained from the experience of a chronological narrative

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film Staiger argued for the importance of recognizing more detailed strategies which might take account of, for instance, the roles played by empathy, affect and emotional response in the varying activities of individual viewers. She suggested that the two main contextual boundaries of historical time periods and audience identities, whilst useful in themselves, are inadequate for the recovery of a sense of the full experience of film-going. We need to consider a third boundary, that of temporality, in our discussion of the multitudinous activities of reception. In this way, she drew attention to the small but important body of work in film studies which has looked to approaches more familiar within cultural studies to investigate the processes and practices of spectatorship. In a still provisional listing of possibilities, Staiger outlined how different audiences make sense of film before, during and after the actual event of watching a single text through the acts of talking and discussion. Examples ranged from the formation of websites and the memorization of lines of dialogue, to the 'call and response' behaviour used among components of the African-American audience. In the second of the keynote lectures, 'Home alone together: Hollywood and the "family film"', Robert Allen suggestively explored the relationship between the discursive structure of the family in contemporary Hollywood film and the concept of modern-day family entertainment. He demonstrated the importance of questioning precisely what is understood to constitute a 'film' in the context of the contemporary climate of proliferating media technologies and diversifying markets, not only in economic terms, but also ontologically and epistemologically.

This conference clearly demonstrated the extent to which the investigation of the actual audience has become a key site of enquiry for film history and theory. The impetus to historicize, particularize, specify and localize has produced a wealth of work which seeks

to look at localized instances of film reception, their conditions and contexts, and to reclaim specific histories and identities in the face of the textually constructed, theoretical spectator who historically has dominated film studies. Michael Hammond introduced a fictionalized scenario, based on empirical research, to outline the specificities of spectatorship in relation to one film text in one place at one particular time: the reception of *Civilisation* (Thomas Ince, Triangle, US) in Southampton in 1917. By positing the idea of the role that geographical and social distinctions play in the actual behaviour of a given audience whilst watching film, Hammond's aim was to overturn the notion of an audience produced or positioned solely by discourse. The issue of historicized place, in this case a port which was an important literal and metaphorical point of arrival and departure in relation to Britain's relationship with the USA, created particular resonances for what was termed the 'event environment'.

Elsewhere, re-evaluations of earlier work on the reception of films and movie-going practices were mobilized in the face of universalizing models of spectatorship which have dominated this particular field as a result of debates, particularly in feminist film theory, ongoing since the mid-1970s. The concern in the contemporary theoretical climate with placing the 'moment', the local, the historically specific, in the way of overarching narratives of history has produced a wealth of new research throwing light on the conditions of film reception at particular instances, in particular locales. Previously unresearched audiences – those constituted 'others', such as children, immigrant and working-class movie-goers – were made visible, and there was a concern to reconsider the basic vocabularies of film theory, with the usefulness of such terms as 'spectator', 'text' and 'identification' being called continually into question. The most successful papers were those sensitive to the need to construct a realistic field of investigation in which the

constituencies of gender, class, and national, religious and sexual identities were recognized. It was alarming, though, to witness the way in which some speakers appeared still unwilling to frame their enquiry in relation to these issues, thus reducing discussion, at times, to dehistoricized, non-specific concepts of cultural taste. As a counterpoint to this problem, Erica Carter's finely tuned discussion of the way star images in Third Reich cinema acted as bearers of a negotiated relationship with Hollywood at a specific moment in history was an exceptional example. More of this kind of precision and attentiveness to the workings of visual discourses would have been welcomed throughout the conference.

Rather than positing a universal film spectator constructed in and through the operations of the text, the kind of micro-historical work assembled at this conference sought to offer carefully contextualized instances of film reception which together produced a composite picture. This is perhaps the only way in which film theory can productively move away from existing hegemonic models of spectatorship. Debates within feminist film theory over the past twenty-five years have been key in both producing that model spectator and in prompting the shift towards a questioning of this universal and ahistorical model of spectatorship. Many papers sought to reconstruct the activities of particular audiences from historical evidence. This work mobilized wide-ranging sources of documentation from critical writing, trade papers and local newspapers to box-office receipts and demographic studies. Several papers also reappraised earlier quantitative and qualitative data produced by researchers in a particular period of interest. This interesting methodological move highlighted the fact that only seven or so of the fifty-one papers and two lectures were based upon studies engaged in producing *new* data from audience accounts collected using more

'cultural studies' methodologies such as interviews and oral history techniques. This is not to suggest that accounts collected in this way are in some simple sense not 'textual', for of course in important ways they are; neither is it to suggest that such 'evidence' is in some way more 'true' or transparent than similar data produced by someone decades earlier. Qualitative data produced in the 1920s or 1930s, for instance, as several papers demonstrated, has a vital role to play in challenging and making visible audience histories which are otherwise inaccessible, or have yet to be considered. There is, however, a significant distinction to be made. The as yet relatively small body of work which engages with audiences past and present 'face to face' demonstrates the extent to which such empirical work is perceived to be theoretically and methodologically too 'tricky' – not just in terms of the practicalities of contacting audiences, gathering material, economic restrictions and the politics of interpretation, but also in relation to issues of emotion, subjectivity and memory which work with film audiences present and past brings to the surface. As yet, we have little critical vocabulary and theory through which to discuss and understand the kind of material that this sort of research generates. Nonetheless, Staiger's assertion that 'scholarship should investigate not just the event of filmgoing but the continual making and remaking of the interpretations and emotional significances through the lives of [the] individuals' came back to haunt the conference in Annette Kuhn's fine exploration of the notion of 'enduring fandom'. By staging the relationship of the past to the present through a prescient combination of text and recovered memory in the form of oral histories (or 'memory texts') regarding *Maytime* (Robert Z. Leonard, MGM, US, 1937), Kuhn suggested that spectators make new or ongoing stories out of old. Here we saw the return of a much missed turn of phrase at the conference – the notion of a

repertoire of cultural competences – to delineate the processes by which individuals make sense not just of their experiences of cinemagoing but their integration of that experience with the matter of an ongoing personal history.

Work which reappraises *earlier* empirical data produces audiences who are as well-behaved and methodologically appealing as the textually constructed spectator, and who are certainly less likely to contest an interpretation. Perhaps the most exciting and thought-provoking moments of the conference were around those papers which demonstrated how the kind of questions being addressed in theoretical terms about the relationship between 'texts' and 'spectators' can be put into practice, and the empirical data on the

activities of audiences past and present theorized in a sophisticated, productive way. 'Hollywood and its Spectators' did present a wealth of exciting new research which demonstrated the liveliness of the growing field of reception studies, spectatorship and audience research in the study of film history and theory. It brought into focus the extent to which in a relatively short time our understanding of these areas has increased internationally. At the same time, the conjunction of such a broad range of subjects of investigation and methodological approaches raised important questions to be answered and issued challenges which must be taken.

Rachel Moseley and Alastair Phillips

report

Colonial Imaging: Early Films from the Netherlands Film Museum. The University of Chicago, 21–22 November 1997

Although ignored in most film histories, western filmmakers early on recorded the lives of 'exotic peoples' for western audiences. Examples of such nonfiction films, beautifully preserved and restored by the Netherlands Film Museum, were featured in 'Colonial Imaging: Early Films from the Netherlands Film Museum', an event that combined screenings of a wide variety of silent nonfiction films with a symposium. These films, made by different European and US companies and capturing vanished lifestyles and customs from around the world (including Egypt, South Tyrol, Japan, Hungary, India and Hawaii), offer a glimpse into film history and representations of other cultures that are breathtakingly beautiful, historically revealing, and often deeply troubling. Each of the five very different film programmes was introduced by Daan Hertogs and Nico de Klerk of the Netherlands Film Museum; they included commercial films, 'propaganda films' sponsored by the Dutch Colonial Institute, scenes from Europe and the USA, Martin and Osa Johnson's films about cannibals and lions, and 'home movies' from the Dutch East Indies. Viewers were particularly surprised by the colour processes in the films, especially by the stencilling in such visually lush films as *Japanese Ladies* (France, c. 1925) and *The South of the United States* (Eugene W. Castle, US, 1928). Musical accompaniment featured composer Sebastian Huydts on the piano, and a special performance of traditional Indonesian music by the Friends of the Gamelan ensemble.

Three panel discussions scheduled between the screenings brought together archivists from the Netherlands Film Museum, film historians and experts on colonial history

(Dipesh Chakrabarty, Nancy Florida, Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, Neville Hoad, James Lastra, Rachel Moore, Rudolf Mrazek, Jennifer Peterson, Lesley Stern, Jacqueline Stewart, Katie Trumpener and Yuri Tsivian). The panels were loosely modelled on the workshops held at the Netherlands Film Museum in Amsterdam in 1995 and 1996: several panellists provided historical information and raised theoretical questions about the films, after which the audience quickly joined in the discussion of the previously viewed material. Since the panels brought together film historians and experts on colonial history, the discussion revolved around two major issues: the function of these films within the project of colonization, and the potential of these films for revising existing film histories and theories. Within these overarching issues, the question of performance often emerged as a linchpin around which questions of colonial history and film history crystallized.

Throughout the symposium, participants discussed the ideological function of these films. While they generally seemed to agree on the films' complicity in the colonial project, many also emphasized how they often seemed to exceed their colonizing intent. Gunning argued that these films belong to a 'visual culture of curiosity', that they capture irretrievable moments of particularity from an elsewhere and 'elsewhen' which cannot be assigned any simple ideological function. This longing to make a 'then and there' a 'now and here' could potentially conflict with the desire to take visual and narrative possession of the colonies. Nancy Florida uncovered a somewhat different ambivalence on the part of the white colonizers. Calling attention to the many departure scenes in the films (especially in the home movie *Departure of the Sanders Family from the Dutch East Indies* [1937]), as well as the many shots from moving vehicles, she remarked how no one among the colonizers really wants to stop, and read it as the colonizers'

simultaneous, and maybe contradictory, desire to escape from the colony and to capture it on film at the same time. While Gunning and Florida uncovered some of the complexities motivating the western spectators and colonizers, Rudolf Mrazek complicated any notion of the films' ideological complicity by emphasizing the cinematic literacy of the Indonesian population. Movies were incredibly popular in Indonesia, Mrazek argued. By the 1930s (when the home movies were shot), there were probably more movie theatres in Indonesia than there were in the Netherlands; camera equipment was 'cheap' enough that 'rich' Indonesians could afford it, so that sometimes the person behind the camera, especially in the home movies, may well have been Indonesian.

Because of such complications on the level of (ideological) function, other participants emphasized how these films are extremely difficult to read – or easy to misread. Lesley Stern, in particular, called attention to Vincent Monnikendam's 1995 film *Mother Dao the Turtlelike* (screened the night before the symposium), which uses documentary footage showing an infant alternately sucking its mother's breast and smoking a cigarette. Stern argued that while this scene invites easy condemnation on the part of the western spectator, it is actually difficult to read, because the cigarette – like the guns in the Martin and Osa Johnson films – were most likely part of the bribe used to entice the natives to perform in front of the camera. In this reading, the cigarette (or the gun) becomes the remaining trace of a complex transaction between those filmed and those filming that the films otherwise suppress. Jacqueline Stewart referred to a comparable difficulty in reading the representation of black skin tones. While Hollywood has a long-standing difficulty in representing black skin tones, and often contributes to stereotypes by juxtaposing the whites of eyes and teeth with the darkness of the skin, the skin tones of natives in films like *The Realm*

of Simba the Lion/Simba, the King of Beasts (1928) are beautifully rendered, with many nuances and shades. At the same time, however, the film is also saturated with stereotypes of Africans who attempt to adopt white ways yet foolishly fail to do so successfully (maybe the most blatant example was that of a woman powdering her face). Like other participants, both Stern and Stewart suggested that many of these films contain moments that defy our ability to read them as cultural-ideological constructions.

In these discussions, participants frequently focused on the representation and performance of the colonial/colonized body, but opinions as to how the body was represented differed. Katie Trumpener remarked how many of the films viewed were obsessed with documenting the human body; she argued that *Dances of Wirèngs in the Cratten of Sumatra* (1912–19), a film which documents how women perform a traditional Indonesian dance, constructs a 'multi-jointed body' – a body with more joints than a western spectator would expect – thereby inscribing cultural difference on the body, even though the body is what everyone supposedly shares. However, other participants maintained that indigenous people, though often harnessed to an imperialist narrative, could express themselves with their bodies. Stern, referring especially to *The Realm of Simba the Lion*, argued that we need to distinguish between moments where people perform, where they refuse to perform, and the moments when their own pleasure in the performance begins to shine through; and Mrazek suggested that the filmed subjects sometimes performed stereotypes before the camera as a defence, mobilizing their bodies as a kind of 'machine' that could counter the cinematic machine.

Within the problematic of the body, issues surrounding the human face soon emerged as particularly intriguing. Hertogs suggested that

the closeup of the face often breaks the stereotype. As Chakrabarty argued, the camera 'introduces the question of the singular', which must be distinguished from the 'type', and which communicates 'alternative ideas of agency, of the face, of presence'. Film thus potentially allows for an individuality that exceeds the stereotype. But at the same time, as several of the participants pointed out, when embodied by a singular face, the stereotype may become even stronger. Moreover, the licence to perform the stereotype often seemed racially marked: in *National Park in America* (US, 1918) a row of Native Americans are made to turn their heads one after the other according to an anthropometric convention; in *French Types* (Pathé, 1905), by contrast, one single comedian is allowed to impersonate (and caricature) a whole range of French stereotypes.

While one set of questions seemed to consider how these films participated and intervened in the history of colonization, another set of issues revolved around questions of film form and film history – particularly the questions of format and genre. As Tsivian explained, these films adhered to rigid generic conventions; the films' titles, for instance, tended to indicate the what and where, so that Russian satirist Arkadii Averchenko could parody travelogues by titling an imaginary film 'Catching fleas in Norway'. Produced at a time when there was little distinction between the documentary and the fiction film, these films borrowed and incorporated the aesthetic and scientific conventions of other media, such as the world's fairs (*North-Africa: Amusement and Industry* [Gaumont, 1913] was actually filmed at a colonial exhibition), scientific anthropometry and the photographic survey. Calling attention to how these films evoked the conventions of ethnography and the picturesque, Jennifer Peterson suggested that such scientific and aesthetic referencing served both as legitimation and as a means of

anchoring 'other' people in familiar modes of representation. This argument explains why many of the films – including *North Africa*, *In Egypt* (Pathé, 1920), *Picturesque Auvergne* (Lux, 1912) – tend to portray 'exotic' people in 'everyday' activities, such as making shoes and selling lemonade. Pursuing the films' connection to scientific conventions, Gunning aptly remarked how they remain suspended 'between vaudeville and anthropology', and Lastra later elaborated on how they allow us to open up the question of the *relationship* between the scientific and the popular. Pointing to the moments when people freeze as they pose for the camera because they conform to the conventions of still photography, Hansen argued not only that these films seem to hover between the paradigms of still photography on the one hand and of narrative cinema on the other, but also suggested that it is precisely the body that is not yet fully narrativized.

In the end, this symposium productively brought together issues of early twentieth-century colonialism and issues of film form, complicating the history of both. What role did the cinema play in colonial history? How do these films – which often do not seem to conform to conventional narratives of the development of film forms – revise existing film histories? How exactly is the native's (performing) body not yet captured by narrative? And how would close attention to native bodies, faces and looks revise more specific, and contested, issues in film theory, such as the function of the look at the camera? While participants raised these and other questions, they hardly came up with definitive answers, but rather suggested the need for further research. The symposium was lively and exciting because it managed to raise these questions, but also because of its experimental format. Because all the audience members had seen the films under discussion, and because the panellists restricted themselves to raising specific issues and

referring to specific filmic moments, audience members were more than passive listeners (as is all too often the case with more formal presentations) and key issues were being developed throughout the symposium, allowing for a mode of interaction that may have resulted in few well-developed

arguments, but rather enabled a wealth of stimulating, collective thinking.

Sabine Haenni

This report would not have been possible without the generous help of Adam Daniel Julia Gibbs Jacqueline Stewart and especially Miriam Hansen and Jennifer Peterson

reviews

review article:

Keith Selby and Ron Cowdery, *How to Study Television*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1995, 241 pp.

DUGALD WILLIAMSON

There is an ambiguity in the now familiar approach to media studies adopted in *How to Study Television*. The book combines textual analysis with a cultural studies interest in the relations between the production of meaning through media practices and the formation of personal and national identity, class, ethnicity and gender. It maintains a sense that this approach is at the cutting edge of arts education because it empowers students to reflect on their own values and the underlying conditions of representation that viewers and producers normally fail to recognize. At the same time, this critical reflection is a disciplinary drill in conventions of writing and reading undertaken for the purposes of assessment. The need to know 'how to study television' is generated not just by the object of analysis but by the pedagogic consolidation of the theoretical framework that the book uses.

The authors integrate semiotics, narrative theory and genre study in a manner that has been the subject of debate. Broadly, they follow what Robert Morgan refers to as an all-purpose 'key concepts' approach.¹ Morgan contends that the usual form of media teaching which relies on ideas such as text, narrative, code, stereotype, audience and ideology is a 'heteroglot' montage of terms drawn from linguistics, literary criticism, social and political theory, industry discourses and so on, held together by 'implicit pedagogic lore' about what constitutes good curriculum design, delivery and assessment.² The problem for Morgan is that teaching practices

¹ Robert Morgan 'Pan textualism everyday life and media education' *Continuum* vol 9 no 2 (1996) pp 15–18–19

² *Ibid* p 14

which use these conceptual tools constitute their objects of knowledge in highly selective ways but justify themselves by appearing to discover meanings or functions already contained in the media forms that they rewrite in the classroom. This critical circle closes out discussion of the ways in which preferred interpretive strategies produce 'meaning-effects' of their own, and generates a 'patronizing, recruitist rhetoric' that 'replicates modes of address media educators are otherwise concerned to expose in the media themselves'.³ In the light of such a criticism, one may make a qualified defence of the type of work represented in *How to Study Television*, but argue for a more differentiated view of its pedagogic role than this book offers.

Selby and Cowdery write that, confronted by the diverse technological, artistic, cultural and political dimensions of television programmes, the student may feel 'like a detective at the scene of a crime with far too many clues' (p. 1). To solve the enigma, they introduce a model based on five main concepts (pp. 3–40) 'Construction' indicates that media programmes may be treated as texts composed by using codes that organize cultural meaning, including technical conventions of camerawork, editing and procedures of mise-en-scene. The process of sense-making also depends on the 'audience' since viewers read programmes in different ways according to their forms of cultural belief, education and so on. Television programmes rely on 'narrative', developing explicit and implicit meanings through event, character and dramatic setting. They activate viewers' capacities to recognise aesthetic 'categories' and respond to the ways in which programmes depend or play on conventional expectations. Finally, various types of institutional 'agency' – including organizational structures and roles, economic forms of calculation and policy operations, working in harmony or conflict with each other – make up the broader matrices within which media texts are produced, disseminated and read. The authors claim that their model 'uses all the major theoretical concepts currently found in communications and media studies', enabling readers to 'make clear statements about the ways in which any media text works' (p. 3).

In case studies on police series, sitcoms, news and soap operas, Selby and Cowdery illustrate how these five factors mesh with one another. For instance, they discuss the links between scriptwriting, format requirements and production schedules in *The Bill* (pp. 84–91) and between comic plotting and the promotion of a central character and star for marketing purposes in *Fawlty Towers* (pp. 114–17). Despite the interest of these case studies, there are some problems in the presentation of the model.

First, an almost complete lack of referencing makes the main theoretical concepts and terms – from the Barthesian notion of myth to the idea of preferred readings developed by Stuart Hall and others

4 See for example Selby and Cowdery *How to Study Television* pp 62, 150 Roland Barthes *Mythologies* (London: Paladin 1973) Stuart Hall, 'The television discourse – encoding and decoding' in Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (eds) *Studying Culture: an Introductory Reader* (London: Edward Arnold 1993) pp 139–42

– seem to be 'just there', as if they were means of revealing the facts of representation rather than mechanisms that support specific arguments about its forms and effects.⁴ Admittedly, it is unnecessary to give students a history of critical ideas before they can apply the techniques associated with particular forms of analysis. However, minimal acknowledgment of sources may help those new to the field to pursue the proposed approaches independently.

Second, the book sometimes blurs the relations between key concepts. So, for example, the ideas of agency and ideology are presumed to overcome the perceived limits of formalism by linking textual strategies to the work carried out by producers and audiences, but it is unclear whether or to what extent these ideas are interdependent. At points, the use of the term 'ideology' (and particularly the plural 'ideologies') implies that the construction of meanings in the media depends on, and varies with, specific cultural practices, values and traditions of entertainment (p. 204). However, this use sometimes slides into a more generalized notion that the relations of text and context are explicable in terms of viewers' ideological failure to perceive the biases affecting their own sense-making activities. Although the authors do not reiterate the theme of 'the formation of the subject' developed earlier in screen theory (the social and symbolic constitution of consciousness and the possibility of coming to awareness of the conditions governing identity), its influence is evident in their claim that the media uphold powerful interests by playing on people's 'unconscious assumptions about "the way things are"' (p. 226). This stress on misguided audience subjectivity contrasts with the more differentiated idea of viewing (and social) agency found elsewhere in the book. It may be argued that interrogating key concepts complicates matters unnecessarily in an introductory textbook. However, since the value of the generalized notion of ideology has been contested within media and cultural studies, and the authors claim to represent the methodological state of play, there is room to reflect further on its pedagogic applications and limits in this field.

Third, generalizations about the ideological nature of representation over-unify compositional and viewing practices. The book's first mention of narrative, for instance, subsumes it under the critique of representation as the process of concealing the discursive construction of meaning to create the illusion of unmediated access to the real.

When we watch a television programme of any type we are presented with a series of events that seems quite logical and natural, but which is actually the result of narrative construction . . . television tends to give rise to a strong impression that things could not have been other than the way that they are represented. (pp. 5–6)

This claim begs the questions of whether, and in what sense, all television programmes are narrative and whether different narrative renderings of similar events are equally problematic because they mould a point of view.

Finally, the book arguably makes too neat a fit between a particular form of theoretical critique and what may be loosely termed the 'generic' abilities it supports, including skills of advanced reading, writing, editing and building arguments; analysing the roles of narrative and other compositional techniques; and coming to terms with the diverse methodologies encountered in an academic discipline. This problem is most noticeable in the final chapter, which bases some of its advice about the micro-skills of essay writing on the hermeneutic use of terms such as 'discourse' and 'hegemony', which are understood to disclose the ideological workings of television. Discourse is 'a socially constructed way of considering a particular topic' and the term alerts us to the ways in which media programmes bring into play 'common-sense' assumptions about 'gender, race, class, age and the family' of which individual broadcasters, participants and viewers are largely unaware (p. 210). Reading involves 'complex negotiation' between the multiple discourses articulated by the text and those of the reader. However, it appears that to demonstrate competence in media analysis students must learn not merely to describe narrative or other representational techniques but to cast doubt on their given form, and hence on their own usual aesthetic and moral responses, by recognizing in them the normative influence of, for example, 'capitalist' and 'patriarchal' discourses.

Answering any media studies question that requires you to take into account discourse theory can be quite challenging because you are not only being asked to establish how a media text articulates certain views on class or gender but also to reflect on your own values and beliefs as being elements of other, wider, social discourses. This is a difficult task and some students never come to terms with the problems associated with it (pp. 210–11).

Similarly, 'hegemony' is a means of analysing what audiences take to be 'unarguable, natural and true' (p. 203). In order 'to proceed to more advanced responses to essay assignments', students must show how formal techniques and categories relate to 'prevailing political and ideological trends' (p. 204). Treating textual construction as the naturalization of hegemonic meanings is a technique for engaging students in a mode of self-reflection in which they may also picture the wider audience as working under, yet potentially resisting, ideological constraints. So, for instance, the idea of hegemony

enables you to emphasise the fact that ideology is an active process. although game shows strive to position certain groups of

viewers – housewives, for instance – as powerless consumers, it has to be recognised that their consent to their own subordination can never be fully secured. (p. 205)

The authors suggest that 'you may then go on to point out' that this is because 'the viewer is actively involved in making meanings': hence, '[i]n conclusion, you can emphasise the fact that although the dominant class may always have the upper hand, its influence can be resisted by some sectors of society'. The attention to advanced writing skills and 'analytic expertise' (p. 211) thus goes hand in glove with the familiar doublet of ideology critique, the naturalization and deconstruction of meaning. The pedagogic role of this poststructuralist theory of representation as a process that exceeds the fixing of meaning in the text is to invite students to relate critically to themselves as the active subjects of ideology (cf p. 205) by learning to identify with others whose historical experience apparently cuts across their positioning in dominant media practices, and thus evoke a political 'community' through the image of the semiotically mobile 'viewer'.

In making the important point that viewers may question habits of media representation and their effects, such passages allow little room to reflect on the arguments that influence their modelling of an exemplary form of writing for assessment purposes. Selby and Cowdery assume that their account of an intrinsic tension in the viewing experience between ideological positioning and the insubordination of viewers is premised on the 'fact' of ideology as active process. However, it might be treated not as a description but a hypothesis that derives from the use of the dialectical technique of reading in which one learns to play off the notion of ideological closure of meaning against the necessary counter-principle of indeterminacy and resistance.

Need this form of dialectical critique shadow the development of generic skills? One possible reason it does so is that the practice of dialectical reading is now firmly established in the use of terms such as code, discourse, ideology and hegemony in the broad media studies curriculum and assessment processes to which Selby and Cowdery allude. It is therefore worth noting that this practice has definite historical bounds. This critical mode of reading – seen in the injunction to reflect on the media views with which one may have hitherto identified as being subject to the unconscious codification of ideological values (p. 206) – appears to be fundamental to student learning because it supposedly reveals the hidden conditions of cultural representations. It is, however, a more contingent achievement. A highly specialized classroom use of media, it is arguably an instance of that distinctive form of aesthetic education which Ian Hunter has called a modern version of 'pastoral pedagogy', in which the teacher elicits students' responses to texts in

5 Ian Hunter *Four Anxieties about English* *Southern Review* vol 29 no 1 (1996) p 6 cf Morgan *Pan textualism* p 16

6 Hunter, *Four anxieties* p 6

7 *Ibid* pp 6 9–10

order to open up their thoughts and feelings, and expose them to the influence of particular norms.⁵ Hunter traces the conditions of this practice to the nineteenth-century elementary school where, for the moral improvement of the lower classes, children's 'spontaneous activity' was encouraged in the playground in order to bring them to examine it under the sympathetic 'supervision' of the teacher.⁶ This fusion of self-expression and conscientious reflection has subsequently operated in a variety of ways and according to changing norms of character formation through the study of literature, media and popular culture in secondary and tertiary education.⁷ Given the virtuosity that the contemporary form of dialectical, ideological criticism demands – requiring as it does that students learn to make the description, use and study of particular media forms into the occasion for an ethical soliloquy on the material but ever-elusive conditions of meaning and subjectivity – it is hardly surprising to hear from Selby and Cowdery (pp. 210–11), as noted above, that 'some students never come to terms with the problems' associated with reflecting on the discursive formation of their own 'values and beliefs'. Perhaps this failure becomes less of a stumbling-block if the dialectical method is relativized and seen as an optional strategy for deciding what counts as knowledge in media education.

Variations in student performance are inevitable because the generation of unequal outcomes is a feature of the educational systems of which media studies are part. Nevertheless, some students and teachers have greater cultural capacity for, and educational exposure to, the emulative art of self-reflection than others. There is a case for asking what weight the latter should be accorded in course delivery and assessment, and for treating the development of generic skills in a more pluralist way than Selby and Cowdery do insofar as they tend to ground it in the formation of critical consciousness.

The book's direct address to students in communications, social studies, humanities and English (p. 1) gives a glimpse of the mixed settings and purposes of media studies, which have expanded dramatically in general education. It is perhaps appropriate, therefore, that some passages of the book read like a public examiner's report, providing feedback on problems which students encounter frequently and advice on overcoming them – problems that have to do with the challenges not only of reflecting on ideological values, but of acquiring a broader range of literate capacities. Evidently written from a knowledge of media studies at different levels in a national education system, the book may be used flexibly to help students 'across the board' gain knowledge and intellectual abilities in contexts of learning and assessment where there are many institutional differences in forms of teaching, course delivery, access to resources, entry levels of literacy skills and degrees of prior familiarity with specialized disciplinary techniques. No doubt applied

semiotics and the closely related methods which the book favours will continue to play a prestigious role in scholarship and teaching. Nevertheless, it is timely to ask if the technique of dialectical critique which supports these methods and circulates widely in contemporary media and cultural studies is a necessary foundation for the range of generic and transportable skills of understanding and communication that students may develop by working in this disciplinary field.

review:

Kenneth Thompson (ed.), *Media and Cultural Regulation*. London: Sage, 1997, 248 pp.

Bob Mullan, *Consuming Television: Television and its Audience*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 245 pp.

ALAN DURANT

Media regulation is becoming increasingly difficult. Fresh challenges to both the means and the precise rationale of regulation have been presented by a cluster of related social changes: the spread of more diversified media technologies and institutions (with relatively fragmented, in some cases distinct, subcultural audiences within a media environment characterized by highly concentrated ownership); increasingly globalized media access, including widespread use of the Internet both for professional and leisure purposes; and greater diversity within many national populations in terms of taste, beliefs and cultural traditions, especially in significantly multicultural societies. How problematic regulation has become as a result of such changes is felt, for instance, in attempts to formulate workable privacy legislation or proposals for national screening quotas, as much as in more traditional regulatory fields such as obscenity, product placement and licensing, or defamation. Response can take a variety of forms. Revision can be made to existing criminal and civil legal remedies, for instance; new complaints and advisory bodies can be set up, or frameworks can be developed for self-regulation by cultural industries themselves. Ironically, of course, the numerous regulatory bodies which have been created to meet the new challenges of media regulation function within a neoliberal climate

which claims to favour the market, choice and, above all, deregulation.

In different ways, the Open University textbook *Media and Cultural Regulation* edited by Kenneth Thompson, and Bob Mullan's *Consuming Television* both tackle regulatory aspects of this changing media environment. Both books discuss topics wider than media regulation alone, but they share a concern with the legitimacy of any given version of cultural value, taste or decency; and both investigate how different kinds of media discourse effects can be either justified or limited. More generally, both offer energetic critiques of the now established view of culture as primarily a tradeable commodity, and seek to explore – as Stuart Hall puts it towards the end of the Thompson volume – 'contradictory tendencies and directions of contemporary cultural change into the new millennium' (p. 208).

The contributors to *Media and Cultural Regulation* address two principal questions. First, how is the cultural sphere regulated and controlled, within what is called (in the closely interlocking series of Open University textbooks of which this volume forms part) a 'circuit of culture'? 'production, consumption, regulation, representation, identity'? Second, what aspects of regulation are likely to emerge as key points of rupture and change (and so of necessary social debate) into the next century? Questions along these lines serve usefully to expose what Hall describes, in *Media and Cultural Regulation*'s closing chapter, as 'symptomatic clues as to what seem to be the flashpoints, the unsettled issues, the underlying tensions, the traumas of the collective unconscious in the cultures of late modern societies.' (p. 231).

Flashpoints of a changing culture are not confined to media texts and institutions, of course. The Thompson volume accordingly adopts a broad conception of cultural industries, as well as of the processes at work in cultural formation and reproduction. Between Kenneth Thompson's introduction and Stuart Hall's critical summing-up, *Media and Cultural Regulation* consists of an appropriately wide-ranging series of case studies. Thompson's own concern is the politics of leisure, which leads into a critical account of notions of heritage. Robert Bocock's chapter focuses on sexual moralities; building on a useful introduction to what 'liberal' means in cultural argument, it explores regulatory issues surrounding feminist debates about pornography and the representation of homosexuality. In a closely argued chapter on globalization, John Tomlinson seems, slightly puzzlingly, more to show how questions of regulation contribute to debates about cultural imperialism rather than the reverse. Bhikhu Parekh's account of national culture and multiculturalism compares developments in the USA, Canada and Britain, and outlines differing strands within multiculturalism in descriptions which benefit from a cogent initial consideration of the concept of 'culture' itself.

Largely following Foucault's arguments for a dispersed view of power, and the shift he identifies from economic and institutional to subjective forms of power in late modernity, 'regulation' is conceived, in *Media and Cultural Regulation*, as encompassing all processes involving power. Such processes include explicitly regulatory frameworks (such as government policies, procedures and laws), editorial interventions of different kinds in discourse content; tendencies towards self-censorship and conformity; and a variety of other processes of cultural reproduction and change which shape and re-shape the prevailing order of signifying practices so that everything appears regular, natural and normal

Understood in this way, regulation is no longer a mechanical agency, but a dynamic process which is affected in complex (and often reciprocal) ways by economic forces and other power structures. As such, regulation is both more dispersed and also more variously contested and contestable. Alternative accounts of regulation *are* introduced alongside this broadly Foucauldian view, especially in Thompson's own first chapter, where they are presented under the comparative rubric of 'relevant theoretical developments'. Besides Foucault's own work, the relevant theoretical developments described include Althusserian and Gramscian accounts, as well as Habermas's characterization of communication and the public sphere. This early exposition is welcome. However, not only in this early section but also later in the volume (at least until Hall's concluding discussion of 'epistemological' dimensions of what he refers to as 'the cultural turn'), the presentation of models of regulation is rarely linked to any discussion of their problems of evidence, explanation or potential theoretical incompatibility. As in much contemporary critical discourse analysis, this omission leaves more or less unaddressed the major theoretical problem of either reconciling, choosing between, or in some other way accounting for divergent approaches being simultaneously encouraged, in this case approaches largely derived from Foucault and Habermas. It also leaves unexplored the question whether – beyond its initial, corrective effect in relation to narrowly delimited, mechanistic accounts – the adoption of so inclusive a notion of regulation melts social processes together so much that, although contestation is said to be everywhere, no analytic grasp is actually possible on any particular element or strand.

Despite common themes, Bob Mullan's *Consuming Television* differs from *Media and Cultural Regulation* in almost every major respect. The ambiguity of its title (which reflects Terry Lovell's much earlier, parallel usage, 'consuming fiction')¹ captures the book's concerns well. 'consuming television' alludes simultaneously to the viewing habits and responses of audiences, and also to how television devours significant aspects of social life. *Consuming Television* is a wide-ranging work, though arguably at some expense

¹ Terry Lovell *Consuming Fiction* (London: Verso, 1987)

to its coherence in terms of aims and approach. Mullan offers a commentary on 1994 ITC audience survey data, and works carefully through the reported views of ITC respondents. At the same time, he expresses opinions about the cultural functioning and effects of a changing television environment, discussing especially concerns about television expressed in moral debates surrounding children, sex and violence; the accessibility and balance of news, as well as censorship and viewers' autonomy and responsibility. Speculating about what he calls television's 'uncertain future', Mullan also considers the impact on terrestrial broadcasting of growing satellite audiences; the struggle between market conditions and traditions of public service broadcasting, and the issue of how many channels are likely to be needed or wanted in the new millennium. The complex interrelation between these strands of argument, however – in which are also embedded background mini-essays on topics as diverse as different programme genres, scheduling, bias and television and the Third Age (with a passing 'brief history' of politics and television also included) – is never adequately signalled.

Mullan's ITC survey data are presented interestingly, and highlight, among other things, the surprisingly low degree of awareness among television audiences of the regulatory and policy frameworks within which the programmes they watch are made. *Consuming Television* has interesting things to say, too, about news production and news values as a form of cultural regulation, as well as about the increasing self-referentiality of television forms. The book's style of presentation is informal, sometimes journalistic, and points are illustrated with numerous instances and examples, though such illustrations are usually only listed or alluded to rather than analysed in any depth (with just a few exceptions, such as the discussion of *News at Ten* [pp. 93–5] and of a Bisto advert [pp. 145–7]). Combining ITC survey data with more general, sociological information, Mullan argues persuasively that understanding different kinds and levels of attention paid to television – that is, understanding television-viewing within the larger field of social behaviour – is a precondition for understanding what programmes mean or what effects they are likely to have

Consuming Television does not go very far into critical issues raised by its own data, however 'Television' is acknowledged early on as an environment of multi-dimensional complexity, bringing together technology, a flow of programmes, national and regional institutions, and rituals of family and social life. But the precise nature of this complexity, or the difficulties for investigation or commentary which result from it, are hardly touched on, little account is taken of key arguments about analysing television presented as far back as Raymond Williams's *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*.² Opinion-data presented from ITC surveys, and, in Chapter One, from Mass Observation reporting, appear without

² Raymond Williams *Television Technology and Cultural Form* (London Fontana 1974)

critical reflection on the questions asked or the evident limits of the information produced, and the repeated phrase 'research suggests' and sentence-initial 'obviously' scarcely endorse the claim of engagement with the research complexity of the field. Frequently spilling over from the commentary on ITC data, in fact – and appearing to provide the real trajectory of the book – is a more judgemental and sometimes polemical rhetoric. This is well exemplified when Mullan suggests that 'The cultural air we breathe . . . is too important for our health and well-being to allow it to be polluted by free-market values' (p. 201). At such points, as well as less visibly in the fairly consistent moral vocabulary, the social-science discourse suggested by the survey data and other statistics gives way to a different style and approach – that of the moral essay. Interestingly in this regard, although Mullan's writing extensively cites sociological and media studies scholarship, the names most enthusiastically invoked are those of Richard Hoggart and D.J. Enright, alongside Neil Postman (with Matthew Arnold, F.R. Leavis, and J.K. Galbraith all given passing approval). *Consuming Television* is a book which wants to tell you things, drawing on a rich resource of television experience. Despite the survey machinery, it is less concerned to define the questions it asks precisely or to evaluate evidence or competing explanations in detail. With so many topics to address, the book could hardly be otherwise. But the impression is left that more about less might have offered richer insights without necessarily deflecting the author from his central argument.

Taken together, *Consuming Television* and *Media and Cultural Regulation* contribute valuably, if in different ways, to an understanding of regulation. Both offer insights into an overall regulatory culture, as well as providing illustrations of cultural policy. Slightly less convincing, in my view, are the moves made explicitly in *Media and Cultural Regulation* (and by implication in *Consuming Television*) from cultural policy towards cultural politics. Set against regulation, conceived in its multi-faceted form, there will also be a variety of forms of resistance and cultural re-negotiation. Cultural politics, it is suggested, depends accordingly on what are described as struggles – between individuals or social groups – over specific meanings or interpretations ascribed to texts and discourses, as well as over more general values, tastes, and forms of subjectivity and identity. Whereas regulation is claimed to involve an effort to impose structure and shape on those meanings and values, prominence is given – as a resource for cultural struggle – to the notion that discourses do not have fixed or final meanings, only provisional interpretations which remain open and in play, awaiting successive, different forms of hermeneutic appropriation. Given the important role which such re-articulation of meanings is supposed to play in cultural politics, it is disappointing that so little care is taken

in either book with 'meaning' itself as a theoretical concept: what meanings are; how they are produced and articulated; how precisely they circulate; and so on. In this respect, the frequent appeals to meaning and interpretation in both books remain vague and, to some extent, complacent.

Finally, since both *Consuming Television* and *Media and Cultural Regulation* are described on their covers as textbooks, it is worth considering briefly how effective they may be pedagogically. Valuably, the Open University volume offers a thought-provoking montage of sample critical readings at the end of each chapter (except the closing one). For three out of five chapters, too, tasks or questions are provided, even if some of those questions are starkly unimaginative. 'Have the discussions caused you to modify or add to your ideas on these questions?' (p. 43); 'what do you think about these powerfully contested issues?' (p. 82). Bob Mullan's book offers alternative viewpoints on the issues it discusses, too; but these are generally so embedded in the rapid flow of argument that they seem likely to be difficult for most students to extract and organise. For all its encouraging informality, there is little sense of the reader of *Consuming Television* being invited to engage critically or argue back.

review:

Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: the Extra Dimensions*. London: The British Film Institute, 1997, 308 pp.

HECTOR RODRIGUEZ

While Hong Kong cinema has attracted some international attention, the voices of Hong Kong's vigorous and outspoken critical community are seldom heard abroad. Since the 1960s, critics like Law Kar, Li Cheuk-to and Sek Kei helped to create a lively cultural arena that encompassed daily columns as well as cine clubs, journals and the annual catalogues of the Hong Kong International Film Festival. As a former English language editor of the festival catalogues, Stephen Teo was an important member of this public sphere. His long-awaited history of Hong Kong cinema deserves attention not only because it offers a comprehensive and intelligent historical account, but also because it illustrates the salient methods and assumptions shared by many of the critics who collaborated with the Hong Kong International Film Festival. *Hong Kong Cinema* is in some respects the product of a collective effort

Loosely speaking, Teo shares two assumptions with this critical community. First of all, the book focuses mainly on the interplay between cinema auteurs and genre conventions. This model is, of course, borrowed from the art-house criticism practiced by *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Sight and Sound*, and eventually incorporated into such Hong Kong publications as the *Chinese Student Weekly* in the mid 1960s. Although it offers rich information about performers and producers, the book often focuses on how individual directors accommodate, negotiate or struggle against the generic norms of the commercial film industry. In line with this auteurist methodology,

Teo's concern is to establish a canon of filmmakers worthy of aesthetic appreciation.

The book's second assumption involves a commitment to reflection theory. Movies are treated as historical documents that reflect wider social trends. Teo frequently relates the evolution of Hong Kong cinema to four interconnected historical developments: the former colony's economic 'miracle'; the formation of a local identity; the 1997 reversion to Chinese rule, and Hong Kong's ambivalent and changing relationship to the cultural traditions of China. Emphasizing the 'dialectical relationship' between film genres and social trends, Teo develops a historiographic model whereby society not only supplies cinematic subject matter but also 'informs' the 'aesthetic qualities' of the films (p. 63). This 'dialectical' approach is clearly designed to avoid both formalism and dogmatic reflectionism, suggesting instead a highly mediated interplay between aesthetics and history. Essentially, Teo contends that the imprint of society on the cinema is mediated by the historical interplay of individual filmmakers and generic conventions. Although rudimentary and sometimes unclear, this methodology enables Teo to unify his two central concerns – auteur and genre criticism on the one hand, and the impact of Hong Kong society on film on the other – into a cohesive explanatory framework. Reflection theory is harmonized with the protocols of auteur and genre theory

This method yields valuable insights. Teo suggests, for instance, that the New Wave directors negotiated the genre traditions of Hong Kong cinema not only in order to survive commercially, but also to come to terms with their tense relationship with Chinese culture and politics. The conflict between a local Hong Kong identity and a frequently ambivalent attachment to China's traditions often informed the new filmmakers' stylistic decisions. Other factors enhanced the complexity of this predicament. The directors strove to forge a non-colonial identity while retaining the distinctiveness of Hong Kong history, which was itself a product of the colonial experience. This desire to build a shared past encouraged them to cannibalize old-fashioned genres as markers of a local identity. The amalgam of old and new styles brought about a 'postmodern' pastiche that functioned to identify Hong Kong's historical legacy with the products of popular culture. Intertextuality functioned as a historical strategy (pp 243–50).

The New Wave directors' awareness of genre traditions was also a response to aesthetic demands, particularly the sense that existing narrative conventions were becoming 'moribund' and required elaboration or transformation. Directors also changed genre conventions in order to express their individual voices. This transformation often involved adapting existing norms to the changing demands of Hong Kong society, which was becoming more critical of traditional values and beliefs. New Wave auteur Allen

Fong's *Father and Son/Fuzi Qing* (1981), for instance, transformed the father-son cycle of the 1950s into an autobiographical story that undermined the patriarchal ideology of its cinematic predecessors (p. 63). Teo also suggests that the foregrounding of time as an explicit theme in the films of Stanley Kwan and Wong Kar-wai is a response to the conflation of intertextuality and history that characterizes Hong Kong's new cinema (p. 69).

This approach persuasively shows how something resembling postmodernism can arise as a result of conditions that are, at least in part, distinctly local rather than global. To the extent that genre self-consciousness is very much related to society and politics, Teo is able to imply that an emphasis on form over content, which in his view characterizes the critical reception of Hong Kong movies abroad, simply misunderstands what is valuable about this cinema and misrepresents it as an apolitical tradition (p. xi). Thus Teo justifies his own historical project as an antidote to this widespread discourse.

The book shuttles back and forth between the past and the present, highlighting continuities and breaks while maintaining no more than a loosely chronological structure. This approach allows Teo both to celebrate a few auteurs, and to acknowledge the cinematic traditions which made their work possible. In so doing, the book not only covers an extraordinary range of films and filmmakers, but also manages to question some widely held beliefs. For example, instead of upholding the view that the relationship between the Hong Kong film industry and its counterpart in Mainland China took off as a result of the Japanese invasion and the resulting migration of cinema personnel from Shanghai to the British colony, Teo suggests that the exodus of mainland filmmakers had begun much earlier (p. 7). Teo's attention to the relationship between social change and genre variation leads to important insights about changing representations of gender, such as his observation that Zhang Che's martial arts films of the 1960s were a reaction to the romantic image of 'bookish gentility' associated with the masculine protagonists of Hong Kong melodramas and musicals (p. 36).

The book's underlying emphasis on film as a window on to society, however, leads to some clichéd generalizations. Thus we are informed that Cantonese realist films of the 1950s focus on the family relations because, given the traditionalism of Chinese society, 'the constancy of the family provides each individual with a sense of social well-being as well as with his or her moral codes' (p. 49). Teo also argues that 'the frantic pace and dynamism of kung fu films also reflected both the economic boom and increasing sense of self-confidence among the Hong Kong Chinese in the 70s' (p. 137). However plausible such generalizations may be, they lack sufficient evidence. Perhaps it is true that kung fu movies 'served as an outlet for working-class audiences which may have identified with the

archetypal kung fu heroes as underdog characters venting their pent-up frustration and anger at the establishment' (p. 137), but Teo gives us no arguments to justify such speculative claims. His points sometimes seem obvious, banal or irrelevant. '[Bruce] Lee's indulgence in playing the bumpkin . . . easily reminds Westerners of the infamously rude Chinese waiters in Chinese restaurants all over Europe' (p. 116). A serious limitation of the book is its lack of historical evidence and its tendency to replace rigorous sociological analysis with mere impressionistic commentary.

Teo often reports important factual information without documenting his sources. The paucity of footnotes and the lack of a bibliography seriously weaken the plausibility of this work as a historical account, undermine its usefulness to other researchers, and inevitably cast doubt on the accuracy and thoroughness of the author's own research. In addition, the writing is of uneven quality, sometimes cryptic and barely intelligible. Thus Teo argues that Stanley Kwan's *Actress/Ruan Lingyu* (1992) highlights the 'contradictions between style and formalism, realism and content' (p. 192). Whilst I think he has a point, and an important one at that, it deserves to be articulated with greater clarity and precision.

There are other shortcomings. In line with the author's reflectionist model, the book focuses on very general aspects of Hong Kong society (economic progress, the traditional Chinese family, the reversion to mainland China in 1997) that obviously influenced the local cinema. This tendency towards social generalization prevents Teo from analysing the concrete institutions of film production. Although his discussion of the studio system and the politicization of movie personnel in the 1950s is informative, he does not spend sufficient time considering such topics as censorship policy, the financing of films made outside the studio system in the 1950s, and the relationship between filmmaking and the community of film critics. Many of these issues receive only a passing mention. The emphasis on both auteur criticism and social reflectionism excludes a range of questions which might have produced a more innovative historical account. I would have liked to find out in greater detail, for instance, how small-scale films outside the studio system were financed and disseminated throughout the 1950s. Moreover, while Teo focuses exclusively on films made in Mandarin and Cantonese, there were Hong Kong movies in other dialects, especially Amoy (*xiayü*), which deserve at least a brief discussion.

These objections do not, however, undermine the overall usefulness of this book. One may disagree with its conclusions and methodology, but as they obviously comprise an intelligent and coherent historical model that yields insightful conclusions and covers a wide range of subject matter, this work deserves to become the standard text on Hong Kong cinema.

review:

Lesley Stern, *The Scorsese Connection*. London and Bloomington: British Film Institute and Indiana University Press, 1995, 257 pp.

DOROTHÉE BONNIGAL

In accounting for the cinematic connections that operate within Scorsese's films, *The Scorsese Connection* is a book which registers and documents a particular connection with a body of films. It analyses resonances between Scorsese's cinematic corpus and a personal history, a web of life experiences, of literary and filmic memories. Though (or, perhaps, because) they are avowedly idiosyncratic, the connections Lesley Stern makes between Scorsese's texts and herself as a female reader, writer, teacher and filmmaker (via Freud, Nietzsche, Maya Deren, Godard, Deleuze, Benjamin and Spivak, among others) foster, in turn, a special kind of connection with the reader. The book's associative structure not only purports to be mimetic or metonymic of Scorsese's cinema, it also provokes associations, summoning the reader's unconscious desires, projections, 'screen memories' (as Stern wittily puts it) in an attempt to 'make a connection'

The Scorsese Connection therefore elicits a particular form of engagement with the texts it unravels and interweaves, and, by so doing, the book finds its originality and reveals its subject matter. As Lesley Stern admits, 'This after all is not a book about Scorsese. Or rather it is round about. It is not exclusively about his movies, precisely because "his" movies are not hermetic, they are allusive' (p 220) So is Stern's book. Not hermetic, but allusive, it centrally investigates the kind of engagement invoked by Scorsese's referential strategies, raising issues of readership, subjectivity, race and gender

The challenge of Stern's engagement lies in its adoption of a 'double bind', as the title of her book already suggests. A connection is both an act and a state. It refers, on the one hand, to the act of connecting – of creating, or rather uncovering, relationships between elements which, thanks to the associative process, come to form a coherent whole. On the other hand, it refers to the state of being connected, of being involved, interwoven in an associative structure as a constitutive element, as part of the whole. The term 'connection' therefore connotes both activity and passivity and, as such, it aptly reflects Stern's keen awareness of the arbitrariness of gender oppositions (male/female, active/passive, perpetrator/victim) in mainstream rhetoric. Though it never denies gender divisions nor revels in masochistic subjection, Stern's critical approach is inscribed in an attempt to think 'beyond good and evil'. Without blurring differences and specificities, or lapsing into universalization, it neither absolves nor condemns because it systematically avoids scenarios of victimization and demonization, and consistently stresses the ambiguous configuration of hegemonic categories. By choosing not to replicate the apparatus of oppression in her critical assessment of it, Stern partakes in an ambitious and positive feminist position, one that refuses to be silenced.

A sign of the vitality of Stern's position is her willingness to take up controversial arguments, especially as she is dealing with a filmmaker who has often been criticized for his misogyny and 'femino-phobia', to echo Pam Cook, who is significantly quoted by Stern (p. 216). This is especially evident when Stern invokes Nietzsche or Freud, the other major authority in her book. In fact her position often verges on Freudian orthodoxy, as the numerous references to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* indicate, but in a way which does not necessarily undermine the feminist bias of the book. For instead of merely stressing the mutilating limitations of the male perspectives it summons and discusses, Stern's feminism seeks a strategic 'connection' likely to yield meaning; not a universal one, but the kind of meaning which, in the analytical process, invests in repressed connections and allows the subject to emerge from stagnation.

Such a 'connection' is posited as rhetorical; it even foregrounds its fictionality as a warrant of authenticity. And this is where Stern's book and Scorsese's cinema most interestingly converge, in a common quest for some ontological 'truth', a truth that, as Jacques Lacan pointedly remarked, necessarily has the structure of a fiction. 'Delusion or Death', writes Stern, quoting French Freudian psychoanalyst André Green.

It is the logic of this 'connection' that *The Scorsese Connection* pursues in its organization, with its non-chronological structure made up of seven chapters, which, echoing the circularity and open-endedness of Scorsese's narratives, begins and ends with a discussion

of endings. In chapter one, entitled 'Life is Fraught With Peril', a line from Scorsese's first film, *What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?*, Stern explains what a nice girl like her is doing in a place like Scorsese's cinematic world, introducing many of the leading threads of her argument. Through a discussion of the 'assaulting and exhilarating' ending of *GoodFellas* (1990), in which Joe Pesci shoots a gun directly at the camera (encapsulating Scorsese's cinema as one that 'hits you in the face'), Stern is led to analyse what she calls 'the Scorsesian indefinite ending' across the Italian-American director's filmography. In addition, by tracing connections with other films, 'other cinematic moments and gestures', she also underlines the primacy of metacinema in Scorsese's practice.

Such a metacinematic approach remains consistent throughout the book and is premised by the claim that 'Scorsese's cinema frequently makes a connection between fictional protagonists driven by obsessive desires and the cinematic process itself' (p. 10). On that basis, Stern in turn makes a connection between *Raging Bull* (1980) and Powell and Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948) in her second chapter, 'Meditation on Violence' (a reference to Maya Deren). She reads the ballerina's red shoes and Jake La Motta's boxing gloves as totemic objects which ritualize and act out the characters' self-destructiveness. The relevance of the parallel, confirmed by Scorsese's statements on *The Red Shoes*, also allows Stern to point out the mutual contamination of the masculine and the feminine in both films, thus addressing *Raging Bull*'s exploration of 'masculinity as fantasy', masculinity defined as 'a game that can never be mastered but must be played out, a game in which each manoeuvre is provoked by the force of a bad-object, the annihilation of which would amount to an annihilation of self' (p. 27).

Along the same lines, chapter three bares a link between *Taxi Driver* (1976) and John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), suggesting that Travis Bickle, Scorsese's psychotic protagonist, 'resurrects' John Wayne's character, Ethan Edwards. Echoing one of the most recurrent motifs in Scorsese's cinema, both characters indeed reveal a common obsession with purity and masculinity marked by a prohibition on touch that sustains their racial and sexual fixations. Just as the Wild West is transposed into urban chaos and the cowboy becomes a psychopath with a Mohawk haircut, Travis can be seen to relocate Ford's hero from a pathological perspective. Especially interesting in this chapter is Stern's discussion of Scorsese's own performance in *Taxi Driver*, which produces a self-reflexive sequence based on mirror games, thus establishing the metacinematic dimension of the film. References to *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) underscore such a reading and point to the uncanny way in which *Taxi Driver* reveals the relationship between seeing and

killing, between watching and acting out – in short, between the imaginary and the real.

Stern argues that it is the crossing of this borderline that is the contained threat inscribed within Scorsese's cinema, and that one of Scorsese's strategies of containment is humour, as a challenging discussion of *After Hours* (1985) illustrates in chapter four. Yet is this threat ever fully contained? Through references to *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986) and *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), Stern addresses the perverse and uncanny pleasures of cinema, making, in the process, insightful remarks on the horror genre. Numerous and often enlightening allusions to Jerry Lewis here suggest a connection with *The King of Comedy* (1983) – one Scorsese film that Stern regrettably never discusses at length.

Another regret emerges from chapter five. Apparently dedicated to Scorsese's 1974 film, *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, this chapter never discusses the film as thoroughly as one would have wished but remains, instead, deliberately fixated on its opening. Starting therefore with the film's Red Prologue (read metacinematically and inspiringly related to *Duel in the Sun* [King Vidor, 1946]), the chapter is in fact a reflection on framing: the framing of narratives and experiences, as well as images. Stern admits that she has used the Red Prologue 'not as a way into a reading of *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, but as a pretext . . . to suggest a relation between the work of memory and the logic of textual production' (p. 158). Stern's suggestion is convincing and, while it fits the framework of her investigation, it also reframes it. Indeed, Stern's silence on the rest of the film may mark the limit of her identification with Scorsese's body of work. Possibly confessing the failure of a connection, such critical silence outlines the presence of a repressed borderline within the connection itself, a line whose crossing 'would amount to an annihilation of self'.

In chapter six, Stern analyses *Cape Fear* (1991) in relation to J. Lee Thompson's original version and to Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955). A reflection on acting and a discussion of De Niro's and Mitchum's performances in the respective films develop the notion of a 'histrionic cinema', stressing the baroque quality of De Niro's rendition of the ominous Max Cady. Accounting for the originality of Scorsese's remake, Stern aptly characterizes the film as a mixture of operatic aesthetics and horror B-movies.

The book concludes with a rather short discussion of *Age of Innocence* (1994) which insists on the film's nostalgic resistance to closure and resolution. Such a reading allows Stern to go full circle, as if, mimetically, her book refused to end, hesitant to define the delightful peril of identification, the *jouissance* of mating with a body of celluloid, a mere projection.

review:

Michael R. Pitts, *Poverty Row Studios, 1929–1940*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1997, 534 pp.

Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918–1939*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997, 299 pp.

DOUGLAS GOMERY

Both these two books make for fascinating reading. I learned a great deal from them, and yet they are so different. *Poverty Row Studios, 1929–1940* is the product of enthusiastic fandom. Michael Pitts is prolific, with a dozen titles in print, including two volumes each compiling 'Famous Movie Detectives', 'Great Spy Pictures' and 'Great Western Pictures'. He is part of the James Robert Parish school of movie assemblage, seeking to compile a list whereby the most obsessed fan of Hollywood's Golden Age can locate the source of any and all obscure titles and players. Pitts offers as his sub-title to *Poverty Row Studios, 1929–1940*, 'An illustrated history of 53 independent film companies, with a filmography for each'. The illustration consists of a smattering of black and white promotion stills from the obscure 'B' films that Pitts clearly loves most.

Other than a two-page introduction, *Poverty Row Studios* can best be described as a filmography of each company's complete output, with a short introduction covering corporate genesis and demise. There are neither footnotes nor bibliography, but a rich eighty-page index makes this reference work a handy tome. The fifty-three companies come in alphabetical order, from Victor Adamson Productions and Ajax Pictures through to Tower Productions and Victory Pictures Corporation. With an average of eight pages per company, most entries come in at about five pages, because Pitts

devotes thirty-three to Chesterfield-Invincible, twenty-four to Tiffany Productions, and nineteen to Sono-Art-World Wide Pictures. The biggest and most recognizable members of 1930's Hollywood's Poverty Row are not covered because, as Pitts notes in his introduction, fine volumes on Grand National, Mascot, Monogram, Republic and the Producers Releasing Corporation already exist.

Taking into consideration its price – £67.50 or about \$100 US – the book is hardly aimed at a mass market. Indeed *Poverty Row Studios, 1929–1940* is a classic entry from the remarkable McFarland factory of reference books, published by a two-person operation (Robert McFarland Franklin and Cheryl Franklin) based in a tiny hamlet in North Carolina. McFarland is the ultimate niche publisher in the era of multinational media conglomerates, and so one only hopes that the book will sell at least the 300 copies necessary for it to make a profit. Issuing some 150 titles per annum, and with a backlist topping one thousand, McFarland sells more than \$1m of books per year. With no advertising budget, such reviews as this function at the core of the McFarland business strategy, helping to generate sales to both dedicated fans and university libraries. The other business principle stems from the Franklins' hope that if an obsessive single person – here Michael Pitts – is interested enough to compile a list filling four hundred or so pages, there might be a couple of hundred more like-minded people out there. The unifying principle of a McFarland book is the compilation of some sort of list, putting the company into the category of reference publisher. Thus libraries are always targeted customers, and so McFarland rarely issues in anything paperback. Expensive hardcover editions are intended to last for decades on the shelves of university libraries.

The University of Exeter Press similarly aims to sell to university libraries, but also to the growing number of super bookstores. Shaped as a traditional scholarly tome, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918–1939* comes in a paper edition (£13.99 or about \$20 US) that, if the lure of the title works, will be purchased by bookstore browsers, curious Internet cruisers and the like.

Part of the 'Exeter Studies in Film History' series, and co-published with the University of Wisconsin Press, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918–1939* covers more than the period of Pitts's nostalgic Hollywood Golden Age, but in fewer pages. Predictably and correctly, Vasey includes not only a nine-page bibliography, but fifty-three pages of fascinating endnotes. Indeed her endnotes make for delicious reading as one discovers an ultra-curious mind searching out all possible sources of potential primary data. In contrast, Pitts has penned about the same amount of 'end matter', but all index, presenting no way of verifying the sources of his information.

Vasey, a lecturer in the School of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of New South Wales, is a student of the Hollywoodization

of the cinema, an outsider seeking to understand how and why Hollywood power and influence spread through the world during the early years of the twentieth century. Although the cinema was invented and innovated in a dozen or more industrialized nations at the turn of the century, Hollywood alone came to dominate world film trade. In contrast to Pitts's unabashed enthusiasm, Vasey's view from Australia offers a valuable vantage point, as she truly understands what it is to be at the other end of the Hollywood power structure. One of the reasons the Hollywood vertically integrated firms did so well in dominating not only their own nation, but more and more countries throughout the world, Vasey argues, was because of a well-coordinated trade association – the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, better known as the Hays Office, after its first president Hays, based in Washington DC, not Hollywood, skilfully enlisted the US Department of Commerce under Herbert Hoover to take over market after market around the world. Filmmakers in Germany, France and Great Britain – let alone the much weaker Australia – never really had a chance, as they were unable to block Hollywood or even restrict the major studios very much.

But this institutional history really sets the stage for what Vasey is most interested in – how this Hollywood cooperation mattered on the screen. She approaches this difficult question by examining cases of internal studio conflict, how executives and filmmakers struggled to find the proper mix of form, style and content to satisfy a world audience. Indeed it is here, since Vasey has an argument to make, where we can see the contrast with Pitts (no argument) most vividly. Vasey seeks to demonstrate how the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association functioned as the intermediary enabling the Hollywood film industry to shape the content of its films of the 1920s and 1930s and to make them as saleable in as many markets around the world as possible, and thus to maximize the profits of the major studios. In the process, she argues, the Hollywood industry created an idiosyncratic vision of the world, one which was glamorous and exotic, but also oddly narrow and constrained. For Vasey the Production Code of the Hays Office offered no benign internal system of narrative limitation, but a complex and subtle arrangement of regular internal regulation that minimized resistance from authorities around the world. Filmmakers in nation after nation grew to loathe the Hollywood monopolists, but because of the skill of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association they were unable to mount a political movement to lessen Hollywood's prolongation of power.

Vasey is a determined researcher, ably demonstrating that diligent searching can produce telling documentation. Here she has skilfully mined a vast array of data from the records left by the Production Code Administration, the studios – particularly Warner Bros – and

the public record of the US Department of Commerce. Vasey is one of a growing number of scholars seeking to argue that economic demands and industry self-regulation dictated film content and created a particular view of the world. That such influence was the case cannot be doubted – if it ever was. But a definition of the impact of that influence is surely still up for grabs, as scholars take a variety of approaches to understanding how Hollywood shaped its ‘content’ and ‘influenced’ audiences. Indeed the very words of the analysis – ‘content’ and ‘influence’ – provoke heated debates as film scholars continue to analyse the power of Hollywood.

Vasey’s best work comes with the case studies and examples which make up her final chapters. Here analysis of the particulars of film production opens up the process of Hollywood filmmaking that the Michael Pitts of the world seem wholly unaware of – or uninterested in. Yet Vasey’s four-page conclusion leaves the reader dangling. What does it mean that Hollywood ‘constituted’ its audiences as ‘American’? How did this square with studio bosses seeking to squeeze the most money possible from the system? If the world audience was characterized by bourgeois and consumerist behaviour, as she states near the end of her second-to-last page, why an American version? If, as she concludes, Hollywood’s texts were ‘open’, inviting completion by individual audience members, what implications does that have for the changing nature of the narrative strategies Hollywood seems to have employed? Vasey notes in her final paragraph that ‘In this book, I have described some of the cases that tested the bounds of permissible representation in the 1920s and 1930s, but these were necessarily unusual’ (p. 228).

Michael Pitts also sought to describe the unusual – those studios that survived on the margin, and had little impact on the creation of the great films that he so lovingly embraces in his other books. In the end, we have two books where the particulars overwhelm any discussion of generalizations. I compliment both authors on what they have accomplished. But we need works that seek to make overall sense of Hollywood, works which help us better understand the most telling contours of film history.